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Signature James C. Bronnan

Date June 1986

PEDALING AMONG VIPERS
COLLECTED POEMS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

James C. Brennan
June 1986

For Jamie Nicole and Meghan Lenore:

A Legacy

"she pictured herself in the corner of her mouth
the spiderplant hanging in the window like a
censor
leaned against the darkened glass
watching words wait for her"

-Marilyn Kallet
"Her Story"
In The Great Night

ABSTRACT

This collection of poems wanders down dark paths normally reserved for science. Specifically, it seeks to discover nuances of human behavior informed by a theory of brain evolution articulated in Dr. Carl Sagan's *The Dragons of Eden*. It is down these paths with a different flashlight, however, that the author follows Dr. Sagan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE	3
Places We Can't Reach.	4
Face Dance	7
Appealing.	8
Mayday	9
Vespers.	10
On Watching a Deaf-Mute Order Whiskey.	11
Pedaling Among the Vipers.	12
Fast Break	15
Missing Persons.	16
Close Encounters of the First Time	17
Smuggling.	20
Surfing.	21
Alone in the Woods After Rain.	22
Places We Never Were	23
Nightshade	24
Places of Luckless Abandon	25
Places Where We May Not Belong	26
Places of Refuge	29
Waging Fatherhood.	30

PART ONE (continued)

Flushing the Venom	31
Reunion.	32
Reverie I.	33
Reverie II	34
Places of a Dreadful Weight.	36
Out of Time.	39
Places That Grow Smaller	41
Leaning.	42
Reflections in the Aganippe Spring	43
PART TWO	45
Rasping to Consciousness	46
Of Comet Halley and Other Concrete Nonspecifics.	51
COMPLEMENTARY READINGS	56
VITA	58

INTRODUCTION

Though no collection of poems worthy of the designation is reducible to summary, there was, in this enterprise, an influence upon the creative energy that lends itself to distillation. I refer to the work of Dr. Paul MacLean, chief of the Laboratory of Brain Evolution and Behavior of the National Institute of Mental Health.

Dr. MacLean has constructed a convincing model of brain structure and evolution that he calls the triune brain. According to this model, the brain did not so much evolve into increasingly more complex stages as it accreted into them. The classic line of evolution, as when the fins of fish evolved into the limbs of land creatures, was not followed. Instead, as the demands of survival increased with the complexity of the life forms, the brain responded with ever new layers of capability, but did not replace the previous layers. Thus, through three major stages of evolution--from reptile to mammal to primate--the brain has accreted into a three layered organ of complex interrelations.

The process began several hundred million years ago when life first colonized the land with the emergence of the reptile. New brain structures appeared as well. They rested atop those ancient components all life forms require for simple existence, and they generated an entire new range of behavior patterns unique to the reptile. Approximately one hundred fifty million years ago the

mammal evolved and entered into competition with the established reptile for survival on the land. Characteristic of the mammal are the brain structures of the reptile plus a new overlying set of structures containing blueprints for behavior peculiar to the mammal. Then, tens of millions of years ago, the primate evolved, and ultimately led to homo sapiens. The final layer of brain structures accreted with the primate; thus, primates became the first life form with all three structures, the first to elaborate the triune brain.

Dr. MacLean has named the reptilian structures the R-Complex, and has demonstrated that it plays an important role in aggressive behavior, territoriality, ritual and the establishment of social hierarchies. He calls the mammalian structures the limbic system; it is here that the articulation of emotion and states of mind resides, and of such powerful procreative instincts as parental care of the young (in general, first evident in the mammal). The final layer is, of course, the neocortex. Evolved with the primate, it has reached its most advanced version in the human brain; indeed, it is responsible for such capabilities as abstract thought, reason and language--behavior that makes us uniquely human.

For MacLean the implications of this model on our understanding of human behavior is profound. But such exploration is not the exclusive province of science. These poems are an attempt to represent some aspects of triune brain activity in a format less clinical, less analytical, less illumined by the often too bright light of logic and reason.

PART ONE

PLACES WE CAN'T REACH

Mother pictures our past
in portraits of silver and smoke
a kind of pointillism
each word dabbed into place,
an array of them
one untouched by another.

She recalls when I was six
and avid
to learn what rested
on the top shelf
of a dark closet:

from a stool I stretched
gained the edge with my palm
sweeping until it struck tin
and pulled a can to its side
sucking a turpentine rain
deep into my lungs.

This is as far back as she likes to go.
But I goad her to probe further

to the time before my six,
to the silver and smoke
on a blistered canvas.

Only she has learned
to glance at my children
and shake her head

not telling me of war June
and she beside a quiet lake watching
the yellow leaves flutter
on Europe's thermal wind,
closing her eyes
when one got close
that maybe it would not light.

I cannot discover my father
and she cannot help me.
He is a presence
in the pictures of some
the memory and grief
of a few.

I goad for lack of a picture
deep enough to feel stubble
along the long jaw.

Hurt is bathed in yellow,
she closed it off
with the slam of a door
not knowing I needed light
however yellow
to catch a vague glimpse.

Is there an ache in your lungs
when you see me grope
like a six year old,
my children struggling
to give me a leg up
to the top shelf

as you sit rocking
outside the dark closet
your head shaking
with knowledge

of the sad things crawling up there?

FACE DANCE

Little good it does you now
calling up her face her
cheekbones pas de deux
in the mercury tableau lifting
on cue falling on whim, shifting
seams impossible to locate.

Moods spun across that stage
in tiny chain quivers elusive
backdrop confusing the issue
into shady jazz routines,
light haunting the pictures
you failed to save
of chiaroscuro translated
into facial twitches.

Little use in drumming her theme
by pillaged fingernails,
that refrain at such distance

I love you gypsy woman
When even the music quit
the corners of the orchestra seat
you left casting swirls in the curtain,
slivers of light fleeing mercury

a pout, a shudder, the plie',
the relentless minuet alone in your ears.

APPEALING

Angela remembers me at my worst
trying to think of ways
I might have changed into something
besides a squid touching
every fibre swimming
by feeling

nothing but the scales.

MAYDAY

Blue

on white afire in slow procession
a solar noon lighting the Virgin white
heating our salty skins
soaking our brightly whites.

Lately

I recall that light frail in steeple shade
yet shimmering between the grains of marble
we trudged past whitely bright
bearing quicksilver in folded hands,

Around

us flitting nuns white in brightly starch
squinting with us in sequence, our heads bobbing
to a beat as upon snakeskin
stretched taut across the centuries.

Ovaries

looted in sectarian fervor, Her cycle stalled;
then we marched by Her eyes of marble bright
in a perfect dark symmetry
to a hushed mad assonance of hymn.

VESPERS

Stealing down the lone brass pendulum
time is a cat

a padded stillness stepping hard by places
we have not shared.

If I shed my skin can you come again?

If we find our portrait in the well we've sunk
can we gather at the reflection

descend the moss-down stone to lap the crystal
picture with shivering tongues?

I would welcome your return and pay lip service
to learn that pattern

of time in the drum of your fingers on the sheath
around my core.

Fog the globe of this lantern as I awake to track us

across your mount petite, and as we surge
will you come with me

if I shed my skin?

ON WATCHING A DEAF-MUTE ORDER WHISKEY

In baritone ambience
desperate hands clumsy
he mimics a shot glass to his lips
pretends to brush

the spillage from his chin it

is really there! bubbling
over lower lip spasms dripping
onto mahogany below an empty gaze.

I sip my sour
in the teeth of hideous laughter
change positions, and swell with an ugly sadness.

PEDALING AMONG THE VIPERS

A string of Christmas lights
 encircles my memory like the
 crystal climbing spruce and cedar

of rich pivots in time as I
 recall that of those mornings
 seeped in anxious pungence and the

glitter sprinkled on imagination's pane
 not one arose quite like that one on which
 I awoke to a stately shrine assembled in

blue tubular steel dripping plastic
 colors, wire spokes flickering in the
 glint of a blinking angel, the whole a

graphic oath to which I owed
 allegiance spawned in embryo,
 to every ritual of which I was

to ride that shrine in revelry
 coursing even through gravel
 like a sampan on ice, rigid blue

steel uplifting me bearing me
 flying beyond spruce, my mates
 gathering, to the time of diamonds

and vipers, ambush on the basepaths
around which we pumped, hormones popping
like skillet grease, resolute atop our

frames of blue steel, squeezed between
thighs tight like our throats, twisting
the grips, our lips stern like Bedouin

lips beneath a sun beating down
on caravans in a sandy kiln, around
wells of sweet water where vipers

squirmed in heat out of rocks
along basepaths and trails we
cruised, streamers whipping with

our shirts as wheelies overtook
us in convention and dogma, and we
turned at home plate locking those

Bendix brakes in awesome gestures of
leverage, sliding to a stop
before Angela's exotic porch

groins adroitly impaled, chuckling
gravely with chewing gum, legs crossed
sitting in pedal shade raptly watching

Angela ovulate, leering like tracks
of spent wheelies, harboring odd notions
gathered in those wire baskets trimmed

in baubels reflecting the light
that scattered the vipers away
from those whining tires along

new paths through haze on which we
leaned and swerved in fits of balance
tottering, with fresh unease alien in

swollen chests, incongruous in
Knights Tubular of Steel, unease
we could not grind up by livid chain

and sprocket and how we slowed
setting sights on strange pavement
thighs drawing nigh, bodies

parlaying balance into
a tepid aggression
itself betrayed

by a sudden shock
of dismembered
handle-
bars.

FAST BREAK

I saw a lost father by a dream
in silver and smoke.

Rapid eyes moving
across a gymnasium
glistening in amniotic varnish.

The great room sweltered
as I sat at an end rubbing my eyes,
shuddered as that steamy world heaved.

The air roiled as if thrashed
by deaf students cheering, fell still
as he entered by the far dark door.

In khakis he came deftly dribbling
weaving downcourt a lone figure-8,
a solitary fast break I quietly cheered.

When I stood to receive the 8's outer
circle my chair exploded in smoke
he vaporized at midcourt engulfed

in plumes from burning diesel bulging
like the silver eyes of those stunned dead
faithfully guarding the Normandy twilight.

MISSING PERSONS

It's an old photograph I found
in the attic of a deceased aunt
among mildewed books on etiquette,
the writing of a proper letter.

Its browns fade into dark white
edges serrated, dull teeth
that nip like snippets of memory.

In the picture is an old man beneath a brim hat
his mouth pulled down at the corners
holding an infant
its head bare and back
its tiny hands wringing
as if to squeeze something out of the air.

On the back in brown ink by an elegant hand:
Biloxi,

June '44.

I do not know the figures in the photograph,
I barely knew the aunt in whose attic I pried;
and now she's gone
we may never learn those two identities
nor whom it was they had lost.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE FIRST TIME

May I come to a great truth in your presence?
beside myself
and you in this musky dark,
The Drifters ballad filters
through a parted curtain.
I see a moth in streetlight on the wall
tracking pheromones
like the diligent scout
it imagines I am, and stops at
the shadow of your shoulder
its shrug a haughty dismissal of silk slip strap
the ease of which stirs envy
in those of us drawn to light
beside you here in musky perfect dark.

My lighter's expensive
lavishes its flame at the tip of your Kool
its glow across those cheekbones
a torchlit procession to your eyes
where we see ourselves watching us alert
for discord as perhaps
columns of moths bouncing off a light source
they cannot penetrate.

In earlier years
the only place I could see myself
was in a round mirror
bolted to the handlebar of my bike.
Clear this was limited
increasingly difficult as I grew taller,
by now out of the question
though for all I know
it is parked outside even tonight.

I defined myself in movement then:
curves with speed and hills with torque
a ball dropped, a swollen lip
a mangled pup carried from the pavement,

anything for movement because if you stopped
the red starlings would catch up.

Red starlings flutter about the ears of those you need
who can't hear you panting
in the key that unlocks your face.
Loving and hearing are separate tines on a tuning fork
stung by the pecking attack of a crimson blur.
No wonder you found me sitting the edge of this bed
my ears covered, mouth open.

Did you feed birds in winter?

The V in your slip suggests geese sailing south
in a Kool fog that would envelop us
but for the tension riding light through the window.
We must be here by inversion of the spaces
we take up to a chance
congruence of times no longer left us.

A moist joining of mouths speaking
in tongues swollen
all around the quick hiss
of skin adhering in

movement,
a dance in streetlight
like ancients around a campfire
dispersing the hoary spirits the red starlings,

a steam mist rising from redolent sheets
in hot fog lifting to the whisper of a graceful fan.

SMUGGLING

These are the thighs that bind
me to that restless port of call
into which I take my leave
from which I slip cackling past customs

an old warlock with fresh roots.

SURFING

Shallow chest pressed
to a waxed yardstick
resonant, a taste of sex
in the wild spray,
riding the lunar throb
of an awesome synergy
across the fingertips

that spin the globe.

ALONE IN THE WOODS AFTER RAIN

Water dripping in meters
like sunlight pulled
through a prism,
each sound astride
a unique pitch as
every ray rides
the wave of its birth;

Mother Gravity
falling
around
us

in the bright loam
you can smell where she's been.

PLACES WE NEVER WERE

When he loved her
spring had found the balds and glades
to nudge to life
as self-conscious laughter posed
in the damp blue spruce.

Then summer passed
beneath their chins, would not be detained;
there were evenings
her eyes stared past his cheek to a glow
of city far
from the slender arm leaving his lap.

When he loved her
autumn colored wildly along the highway,
the wind braided
her hair into rope, jerked his chest
inside out spilled
rib bones onto the concrete
beating the rhythmic click of a tiny army
on the run.

NIGHTSHADE

Night comes with a chill when sleep, a leopard,
stalks you across the grotesque rilles of your sheet.

Unasleep at her touch you turn to a hand receding
into mascara smeared like camouflage about her eyes

smeared like soot from the nuptial candle burned
into an exhausted stump, smoldering.

Your faces bloom in symmetrical rows
like nightshade in a dark greenhouse.

You are here with such panting breaths
as if having come a great distance

even as your footprints separate
winding through candlewax in ever widening arcs.

PLACES OF LUCKLESS ABANDON

Yesterday's regatta echoes in the drum
of our fingers on this slick table.

We deserve a gulf
but are cursed with a creek

trickling over stones
worn smooth by our distempers

splitting into twin streams
branching ever farther apart

through the virile floor
of a permanent forest

our silence hanging like dragonflies.

PLACES WHERE WE MAY NOT BELONG

From here you count her footprints circling you
closing by timid gait the space
where you

hide from
the dying tempest limping ashore
by a nuptial altar now distant and crumbling.

You know this room as you would a friend
suddenly encountered after
vague time:

her oils
and charcoals, the figurines floating
on the sweet breath that blew them into space

and shape; the shells and corals, the lovely
lewd statue you bought at Hatteras,
few books

on the shelf
a Norton Anthology you
rummage those nights she sleeps and you can't,

nights you hug your knees to hold the room
intact, to pull its walls closer
to you.

But night
is alive with whispers and spiders
a crawling sensation that perhaps you

don't belong here among these fine trappings.
For all the affection, the taste on
her nipples

you swear
is white wine, there never leaves you
that place most limbic of all that you frequent

where new growth struggles in the crevices
between dusting altar stones, one with
strawberry

knees, the
other one with homework perched on
thin shoulders like livid owls glaring at dusk

falling in clumps throughout the landscape
between those two places
altar and crypt.

When it
starts to come apart
the room cracking at its seams flooding

in a pool you can swim with strokes tempered
by disorientation, you
discover

both places

dart from your need
to inhabit them

like schools of tiny fish
fleeing the sudden descent

of a
human
diver.

PLACES OF REFUGE

Artists seek shelter
their paints curdling
in the lethargy of a species
squeezing its eyes closed.

Picture them
banded like Apostles
skirting the edges of
crass pasture finding
barns of weathered wood
where their figments cure
like hanging hams from beams
hewn in the sweat of a primal brow.

Inside
there is no weight
to the quick thin air,
slatted light manipulates
the floor into an archipelago
little gleaming islands they populate
sitting chanting in barns, their shelter
who turn those figments in hands open closed
arched in elegant cortical prayer.

WAGING FATHERHOOD

From her magic hat
she sometimes pulls
little rabbit ghouls
squeaking like Sirens
turning her head,

a crestfallen playmate
a dream unaccounted for.

Don't worry about it

someone said
sounding for all the world
like me,
ridiculous as it seems.

REUNION

Watch her cross the lobby
that weight of bad marriage on her hips
remembering the best and worst of a Ford

backseat in a time
when bad marriages steamed
breathless in incubation

fogging the panes
through which no one could see the self
disperse into narrow files of fireflies
quietly burning out.

REVERIE I

Weak knees are a strength
when you have come
bolstering her resolve
to pluck amber freckles
from your cheek
your chest,
and dote upon a note
slow carried
by navel escort
lying off the lush scrub
of a cove growing wider.

REVERIE II

You could hear the sound of amber in her smile.

Coaxing you from the slurry you worked
she touched a wild pelt in that brittle place

you age anxiety in casks with caged fronts.
For an endless spasm of light earthen juices spilled

washing the ache and grime from beneath your
fingernails, she seemed a fantasy floating

on the water of your eyes, a flower barge drifting
the glass pool fed from the tip of your throat.

But these days you move slowly when alone
soak in mild unguent listening to the windows,

straddling this fir chair by a fire overlooking
the lake, and an hour after the year she's gone

you still taste her amber come spreading
through the fog blue and settling

with a rush.

PLACES OF A DREADFUL WEIGHT

I: The Evening

In a mountain town
new to us both
we ate in a place
of low yellow light
where I gave her
the pearl dolphin.
She placed her ring
in the ashtray
to whisper of pain.

He would confine her
to the couch
as it pleased him,
sometimes circle
loom
like a blind frigate
in fog, but often
close quickly
perspiration screaming
from her every pore
as he plied her waters,
a U-boat
cut roughly loose
from its primordial
port.

Her tears trickling
over my knuckles and veins

she told of the dream.

II: The Dream

Falling
upward
turning
in
a
circle
I
cannot
leave

my ankle anchored
far from the water's edge.
It is either day or night.
A chiffon veil
blows from my face leaving
me startled it falls
to rest
among rocks.

At first
a buzzing
of insects,

a fluttering
of great birds
leaving in haste:

the awful snort is sudden
like wind snagged in a gulch
air in ugly expulsion sputtering.

I am treading a circle
in the arena
of the stout warthog
bearing in rooting
my veil
a silver chain around
its neck rooting
among slender legs
of
saplings,
massive in my circle
blood drop eyes
pitiful tail erect
rooting rooting
frantic snorts the mute cry
of a rent veil I

awake.

III: The Time After

I cannot discover how I lost her then,
the week's shadows lengthening
to pull her away.

Did she escape?
Or did that bruise
the one he so enjoyed
finally crystallize
around the treacherous morality
of her upbringing, glazing
her over like the eyes
of a beached dolphin?

My own dreams are murky,
except the one
where the great hog and I glare

at each other across a vast trough
the veins of my hand entwined
with the silver chain I twist
into dawn.

OUT OF TIME

Once upon some thyme I chanced upon your face,
 in tavern dusk I pressed together whorls of time
 on my hands remembering your burnt pearl smell
 staring, as he squirmed beside you, glancing over
 the narrow years cornered at the edges of our eyes.

*And how have you been? You asked as we sipped thyme
 adrift on Benedictine floating in sickly sweet pools.
 I was well, we agreed, doting on saffron and beige
 a candle's petty glow, like children rapt in an empty*

*sandbox. Did I hurt you that day? I veered to inquire.
 Of course not you said I was in another me by then
 . . . and I you?*

*Heavens no I mused for by then I was wrapped in the
 smug other me.*

*Sure you said and I pushed on to later mes in more of
 a hurry, to yet to becomes holding seams between shadows
 and you?*

*Oh, staying busy as well pushing crystals of sand into
 significant piles, a race against time
 if you know what I mean.*

We shrugged and sipped, building moats without castles
 our candle stillborn, until finally I nodded at him:

Your son is quite handsome . . . reminds one of you.

You permitted a beam recalled in a heartbeat
whispered *another you* and laughed it away.

In saffron and beige our wicked grace shone
and we knew, maybe cared, that somewhere out there
another us lay in the light just between time.

PLACES THAT GROW SMALLER

The old house
its windows closed
as the lids of a frightened child.

We are quickly here quietly

called to our knees
not in prayer
but listen,
to the driveway,
the sound of a grey Plymouth
leaving with the leaves one fall

in a pattern of thin shoulders changing shirt size
into a dizzy spell of strange roadbed.

You are pleased?

It is because you see me feel a wonder
for this place once so tall,
at space shrunk in a shower of time
swirling down drains
of all those places we leave
auguring the anxiety
for those we have yet to arrive in,

listen.

LEANING

Over
the hand
rail
peering
into
pond
past
lily pads
to a

blue

universe

expanding

in
the
fin
ripple
swell
of a
minnow

swimming.

REFLECTIONS IN THE AGANIPPE SPRING

*Wait a minute, baby
stay with me awhile
said you give me light
but you never told me about the fire.*

-Stevie Nicks

"Sara"

You remind me of someone I've never known
a book barely leafed
a form
avoiding shape behind my eyebrows.

I reach to touch your smile
my hand wild along the parabola
bending at the weight
of our shudder shadows
circling each the other.

We rise as one quick breath in moist dawn
our sound that of light
startled at a deft brush
in a hand wringing order from itself.

With brandy we retire to a library sumptuous
yet stunned
at the emptiness of its shelves,
echoing the banal beat that asks you to dance
pulling you away
in the grinding of my teeth.

I squat
by the damp fireplace
in my hand an icy poker probing ash
listening for the slam of your cardoor your keys
the phone not ringing like tiny brass bells behind my eyes,

knowing if each day I place a single book upon a shelf
succor the curve of time streaming through the window
book after book into days upon end, the evening
you return we'll fire the ash
and read fine passages
each to the other.

PART TWO

RASPING TO CONSCIOUSNESS

I. Whispering

before you drew breath
I twisted up sunlit ice canyons
below an eerie wail between sand dunes
among reeds across Earth empty yet of your

low gait
the measure of your frightened eyes.
Circling colonies of claw and gill I hung
in layers above the ground panting and sweeping
placental wastes up into a fertile alluvium

waiting
for twilight languid
in the deep vaginal rift
where you emerged wary of seasons,
the stark silence of light in rhythm with dark.

With turmoil
I swelled your limp sacks
spread the primal mist of awkward beginnings
humming a refrain across the wild savannah

carrying
 the stench of hidden strife
 slamming it against your gaping face
 stirring your dim notions of sounds
 my old breezes rustling root fields.

To Laetoli's
 sweet ash I pressed an ear
 for your urgent shuffle on trek to Eden,
 a gathering of seeds you harbored until clouds
 ripe for salting could rain to rinse your eyes to

see by fire
 at Koobi Fora you strike
 the quartz into planes of smooth vision
 a magic schist triptych watching you see
 implements in sparks dancing across crystal

of the time you would have.

II. In eddies I followed you out along paths diverse
 as the caterpillars entwined in your loins
 to enclaves cut into the ruthless struggle . . .

III. . . . light bent
 between rivers
 floodplain rich
 in trees and reeds
 wind

wafting and raging
rising in muscular columns
up to a swarm of hatching cocoons
spotting
a vermillion dawn.

IV. Wind

heavy in molecules pregnant
with the instant of noise becoming sound,
whistling through eye sockets the tune
of a dark mime, shadows tripping
through the quartz chips of a thousand camp sites
scattering the chafe of enclave, little narrow
husks lost in the closing dark.

Wind
carrying rain
of sudden gully death,
filling the high dome
curling into columns pressing

down past layers
tightening around the throat
wielding a density of virile spores
the great weight of things alive pushing
against your chest your shoulder blades bent

you sucked to inhale the airborne grit
of a universe suddenly aware of itself:

rasping to consciousness
in a garden

(memory)

light bent
between rivers
floodplain rich
in trees and reeds
a dim threat of reptile,

wind
across your eyelashes
opening to see a cobalt sky above.

- V. Perhaps this was the moment of song
as song would have begun in a gasp
the sudden sweet paroxysms
of knowing what you saw
seeing what you thought
lilting gasps
of song chanted
of song murmured
song carved and painted onto cave walls.
And the notes of being accumulated
in your blood until I spread rabid bubbles of
oxygen freeing the effervescence of existence

rising like great plants leaving the sea bed
to fill the arch of your high dome.

You carried your song
from each of your gardens
a frail refrain at first,
soon a symphony for wind

the song of the seasons
of a single waking moment
across eons above
the great chasm

of how long you might be here.

OF COMET HALLEY and OTHER CONCRETE NONSPECIFICS

I: The Comet Has Come On Prior Occasions

Your comet, Mr. Halley, runs amuck in our alley
of the cosmos on occasion,
arrogance from the Ooo cloud
meretricious slipstream of light
wending out of a dark hydrogen dust
teeming with vacuum.

Into view swarms a glitter of primal ice,
Earth eyes wide as witch cauldrons steaming
of roots and berries gathered,
the clans and bands slow to abide
a night needle stitching in the dome tapestry,

the gaping mouths.
Across the sky a temporal flash
of something uterine in the frozen lodestones
glowing in its vastness of no apparent purpose.

II: Litany of the Bands and Clans

In an industry of priests
is forged the bronze hush
of desperate prayer

across altars caked with gore
a shadow skims
the night needle lacing a loathsome cloak.

Of the noble savage
is soon heard
little enough

an echo perhaps
a plaintive notion
of nature

as a womb
benign
on occasion viscious

raucous in the extreme
rupturing in rejection
of noble fetuses.

To a king
of civilization
portents bear frightening weight

of headdress:

iguanas curling one
out of each ear

to join tongues
above the head
of Montezuma

cognizant
in jungle heat
of the reptile hiss

and of the one
who would come
in a white fury

in
the gleaming teeth
of oblivion.

Indignant ignition
of the night needle
new to the Aztec sky

heralded
the coming, stirred
the Magi bearing gifts

of Christianity
syphilis
and powderburn

that Montezuma
mired
in wretched doctrine

embraced
clinging even as his beating heart was yanked
and fed upon by departing indian ghosts.

III: A Comet of Our Own

It arrived in the fall
of time relentless down this sluice
to the next century
where we high tech pan for nuggets
incandescent with insight lifting

us above the savage noble shadows.

We know it as spectacle
worship only its physics,
a metronome
beating the anthem
of those first cosmic notes,

reinforcing disregard
for ruinous portents,
departing indian ghosts . . .

. . . still,

I overheard a nod to the ancients:
just to be safe

at the Ides of March
when the vision begins
we should sacrifice a virgin

releasing her carbon
to remingle up there,
her Earthly egg cells
to innundate the blazing spirochete
and quench the thirst
of that arid dark distance
we may one day have to cover.

COMPLEMENTARY READINGS

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VITA

James C. Brennan was born in Burnet, Texas, on 20 April 1943. He attended elementary school in Knoxville and was graduated from Knoxville Catholic High School in 1961. In the summer of 1981 he entered graduate school in The University of Tennessee's Department of English where he earned a Master's degree in English with Writing Emphasis.

Some of the poems that comprise this manuscript have been published in the following publications: *Reach of Song/Book IV*; *Black Bear Review*; *Eve's Legacy*; *Reach of Song/Book V*; *Caesura*; *Poetry Motel*; *Mid-South Poetry Consortium 1986 Annual*; *Reach of Song/Book VI*. In addition, the poem "Fast Break" was awarded third place in the Georgia Poetry Society 1983 Daniel Whitehead Hicky National Competition.

Since 1973 the author has been employed by Brennan Insulation Company, Inc., of Knoxville where he currently serves as president and CEO.

He is married to the former Katherine Reynolds of Knoxville, and is a father of two daughters, Jamie Nicole and Meghan Lenore.