

Rites

*of the*

Earth

*Selected Poems*  
*1965-1990*

by

Finn Bille

***Rites* of the *Earth***

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*1965-1990*

by Finn Bille

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Rites of the Earth

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*for*  
*Jeanne Bille &*  
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Notes

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**SPEAK**

Speak your words as trees  
say the land—  
as a hickory states the Smokies,  
a mesquite utters the Sonora.  
Speak your words as a redwood  
proclaims the Sierras.

Speak your words like trees:  
deep-rooted, branching,  
and core-bound.

**ORDER**

slow motioned chaos  
 heaps dunes  
 millioning grains  
 order clouds off  
 leaping dunes  
 that migrate as the wind blows  
 heaping dunes  
 slow motioned chaos  
 of millioning grains  
 of order clouds  
 leave dunes leaping to dunes  
 that migrate as the wind blows.

**DICTIONARY ALLEGORETTE**

As I look up the word penultimate  
 penumbra catches my eye.  
 I have always been fascinated  
 with half-shadows  
 like dusk in rose gardens or  
 partial eclipses of the moon.  
 I look around and find umbra—  
 full shadow—and through its root,  
 adumbrate, umbrage, and adumbral  
 whose dark vowels seduce me like  
 heavy scents, adumbratively, darkly  
 foreshadowing.  
 Umbrageous means easily offended,  
 perhaps as you are  
 at this mere dictionary doggerel.  
 Or perhaps you feel  
 a vague affinity with gentle shadows  
 or disquiet recognition of their opposites,  
 lux, lunate, lumen, even Lucifer  
 limn, luster and lunatic.  
 It now becomes symbolic—even allegorical—  
 and you explore it with me since,  
 as you say, you're not afraid of new ideas.  
 After all, you've driven to strange places  
 to watch a Sunday sunset.  
 Let me call the place you live in  
 by that somber-lyrical name, Penumbra.  
 Explore it, but  
 be careful not to leave half-shade,  
 half-light. Observe, but never cross  
 the borderland with Umbra,  
 land of dark, dark shades.  
 One day you might approach quite unaware  
 the boundary of Lux, the land of bright,  
 clear light, but turn around;  
 hurry back to the heartland of Penumbra.  
 There build your house apart and lock your gate,  
 then go to barbecues and poolside chats  
 with your Penumbral friends.  
 Occasionally praise the light, which you have never seen  
 and pay whatever you must pay to keep Penumbra safe  
 from shadow voices from within  
 and sirens of the light without.

**FLOATING ABALONE**

Sea gulls scream at carrion  
Strain and sweep the blue

For living meat  
Gulls screech the world to silence  
Move the sky to frenzied patterns

Of blue  
Above the twitching muscle  
Wrenched from its rock

Above the vessel  
Floating alone and jewelled.

**OPENING DAY**

The river passes  
under our balcony parapet.

Doves rise behind us, over us,  
then plummet-stroke down for cover  
on the other side—  
like diving porpoises:  
silent grey backs on silent gray water—  
then out of sight.

White smoke-puffs drift up-river ...  
Then we hear the shots.



**AMERICANS ON EVEREST**

I settle in the theater seat  
 and acquiesce to watch the film  
 my outdoor mountain climbing friend  
 has asked me here to see.  
 We are brought into the dark  
 to admire a shining mountain  
 and the men who crawled upon it,  
 or perhaps the complicated task  
 of mounting the expedition.  
 Oh well, we all have our obsessions—  
 at least this one winds majestically  
 with nearly a thousand bearers  
 under post-card pretty peaks.  
 Just another travelogue—another  
 self-indulgence of enthusiasts.  
 But when I hear the speaker's voice  
 say with its studied awe  
 that Everest is also Chomo Lungma,  
 Goddess Mother of the World,  
 there's something here  
 past expeditionary calculations.  
 He mentions "Prayer trees":  
 while we see tall, bare limbs rolled  
 with toilet paper, or a child's  
 idea of money trees that flutter here  
 and pray by winds to mountains.  
 The eye of Buddha watches  
 bare and calloused Sherpas' feet  
 fall into prints of Western boots  
 in stony snow past Katmandu.  
 They walk and balance, wind and creep  
 for miles into a wild, unchristened land,  
 past that last human ceremonial place,  
 the monastery Tang Bo Che.  
 I wonder what can be beyond this place  
 when the speaker says that Everest itself,  
 the Goddess Mother of the World,  
 cannot be seen until you touch her knee  
 and look straight up at Chomo Lungma.  
 Is this the point?  
 The mountaineer sets out on faith;  
 he must believe a goddess hides  
 behind the awful walls of rock and snow.  
 He is a scientist, a modern planner,  
 but when he finds her, climbs her,  
 she will be his Chomo Lungma  
 earned by his squandered breath  
 and aching limbs.  
 Do I understand?  
 The quest is for the range that hides the god;  
 the triumph is the peak that humbles you;  
 the victory is a moment in her stingy air  
 and fantasies of pictures framed on office walls  
 and films that try to show  
 your quest for her, for you, for Chomo Lungma,  
 Goddess Mother of the World.

**THE WILDERNESS HIKE**

With heavy loads we returned before nightfall  
 on the first of our five days' backpack:  
 Reluctant relief hung on the aspens,  
 the comfort of their mild grove shelters  
 embittered by flowers.

**POSTCARD TO MY MOTHER**

Dear mother,  
 I am having a wonderful time  
 at the beach.  
 The wind blows salt and sand  
 and the sea deposits curious things  
 like skeletal remains of life designs.

You would think that my saunterings are strange:  
 timed by the sun and tide,  
 shaped by inlets, sandbars and dunes,  
 and paced by acrobatic terns  
 and the skimmer's elegant flight.

Now on my third clockless day  
 my eyes see more than my camera can.  
 I bare myself to the breathing wind  
 and go naked into the pulsing tide.  
 My hands explore small fishes' bones  
 and shells I will display at home  
 next to diplomas and clocks  
 and pictures of the old home place.

By the way, this postcard doesn't show  
 the beaches of my wanderings  
 and on it the sky is too monotonously blue.  
 Goodbye for now—  
 next time, I promise, I'll write  
 something about myself and how I feel.

**CANTERBURY**

Canterbury,  
 the hallowed name;  
 it starts with "cant,"  
 ends with "bury":  
 cant for the living,  
 tombs for the dead.

Yet look here how  
 the floor is worn,  
 and hollowed,  
 how the light  
 from the same sun

that shone on Augustine,  
 on Ethelbert, and Thomas  
 reveals  
 the pilgrim's  
 thousand  
 footfalls, kneebends,  
 and of these surely some—  
 a small, bright remnant—  
 shunned the cant  
 and walked away  
 to live and sing enlightened  
 despite the bishops  
 and the kings  
 of Canterbury.

**STILL PHOTOGRAPHER**

I have fastened down my camera,  
 Locked the panning head,  
 Set the tripod spikes,  
 Gripped the cable release.

Established over the center of the earth,  
 Like a surveyor shooting his benchmark,  
 A geologist looking for original rock,

I flow through all the elements of glass  
 Scanning the metamorphic rock  
 For a stratum of crystalline forms.

I float through arrays of optical twist  
 Clear, then ghostly in the deep and ambient field  
 Designed by computer for variable warp:

Trees or woolly masses,  
 Waterless waves, groping forms,  
 Stars of diffused reflections,  
 Vague and motley patterns  
 That change like dreams of  
 Sharp, smooth, black-tipped thorns  
 With tiny spots I have never seen before  
 Which all again recedes  
 Into distant, blunt, ethereal shapes.

While the smooth turning of the lens sucks me in  
 and holds my breath,  
 Silver crystals darken silently in their own pattern  
 Of the world that ends with a click,  
 The mechanical clang that implodes  
 The universe upon its origin  
 At the precise center of the birth of it all—  
 Which reminds me of nothing, not even me.

As I exhale,  
 The camera reappears within the habitual world  
 Where I fold my tripod,  
 Where my feet seek the ground of retreat.

Developed in my small, dark room,  
 The negative is lighted into positive  
 While all the crystal grains stand sharp  
 Upon that static paper field  
 Brought partly back to darkness. Stopped.  
 Stopped, I hold it dripping;  
 I see that world fixed finally:  
 Washed,  
 Cut,  
 Dried.

**CHIMUNGA THE BOSS-BIRD**

Riding black the snow-wind—  
 Forever familiar life  
 To Masai herdsmen—  
 The aerial performer  
 Stays hovering  
 And like the perpetual legends,  
 Mates in the African air.  
 The Bateleur Eagle only comes down

As Chimunga the Boss-Bird  
 Because he leads the vultures in.

Out of reconnaissance drifting  
 The bat-like bird descends.  
 Leisurely with linear power  
 He enlarges his image  
 Silently on the sacred snows;  
 He hurtles into thundering air  
 Beating downward curves  
 Into a blackening sweep.

Chimunga the Boss-Bird  
 He leads the vultures in.

He drops  
 Like cranes in courtship light  
 On exhibition wings  
 Slowly furled—  
 A statted bird upon a great curved horn  
 Of a stricken, dying Scimitar Oryx.  
 Claws circle the sword;  
 The eagle mounts the antelope  
 Erect and with lively eyes he surveys  
 From the crown of its dying center  
 A hushed and wing-void world.

Chimunga the Boss-Bird  
 He leads the vultures in.

He strikes as the oryx shudders towards death;  
 He sickles out an eye  
 Still full of sight.  
 The circus bat and priest bird  
 (He saves the dying vision)  
 Struts pontifically  
 Eye in tooth  
 Farsighted and unyolked  
 A shell-less egg potently staring

Chimunga the Boss-Bird  
 He leads the vultures in.

**VICTORY**

This is victory:  
 To enter the temple  
 and do less with jubilation.

To enter  
 after having sent  
 envoys of high vision,  
 priests of prodigious ritual.

To enter  
 after the vision,  
 behind the dream.

To enter  
 to bow, sit,  
 chant the vision in a single gesture.  
 This is victory—

To enter  
 and do less with jubilation.

**ASTROLOGY**

This is to know astrology:  
 To kiss while standing  
 in a cluttered kitchen  
 a soggy and cold lentil  
 off a hot, white egg.

**WANDERINGS**

From wanderings, left in my maze  
 I conceive a right sequence of turns;  
 While climbing the mountains of mind,  
     stones in my haze,  
 topographical lines are unreal as figures on urns.  
 But roused by clowning jays among unfamiliar  
     trees,  
 I calculate and set course by compass degrees.

The cryptic signs in the sand—  
 these metaphors paid out by the left hand  
 energize the needle in the right hand.  
 I have arrived as I go; I run as I stand.

**SPRING**

Spring was festival once  
 attendant with necessity:  
 Obedience to a recurrent ritual

when leaves could not have sprung  
 nor white anemones have shown  
 the end of snows  
 nor jonquils have betrayed  
 the ashes of a homestead fire  
 without their proper rites.

Spring would be invalid  
 without recurring witnesses  
 like marriage vows in secret  
 without the benefit of sharing rites.

Spring was a goddess  
 riding on inhaled air  
 making sap rise and dance  
 roots rove the sacred hills at dawn.  
 Flowers were merely petal signs  
 of divine burgeonings  
 of summer sun-god festivals.

**DANCERS**

Having arrived limping from an acid war,  
we stare into the city of fog and glass;  
out of a vaguely ominous trip we remember:

The future has been a time for dancing—  
so much straw, so much mud—  
until that labyrinthine paradigm  
matrixed the swirling wind  
and spoke the cynosure of binary.  
Steel upon stone upon glass  
until the dust-ground dust parted the dancers.

We are the cardiovascular turtles—  
I strain my eyes  
as I extend my hand to shadows.

**PREMONITORY ACTOR**

Premonitory actor,  
I wear tomorrow's face  
for tomorrow's things  
matched with tomorrow's times  
by time-saving calculations of  
projected schedules,  
controlled divergences.

I am organization's oracle.  
And yet divine  
and timeless  
chaos buds  
witches'  
mushroom circles  
round me.

**L.A.**

Once again I passed over California  
 a hummingbird riding the beak of a condor  
 a feeble toe in each nostril hole  
 a stubborn iridescence in the eyes  
 of the king of the dead  
 heaving the thinning air away  
 in growing patterns of flight  
 toward a rumored light.

Somewhere near sunrise  
 I struggled for a hold  
 I shivered in the height  
 and by cooling winds off the continent blown  
 nearly wrenched to a fall  
     like a blurred feathered ball  
 through L.A.'s sanctimonious smog.

Once again I passed over California  
 not a bird on a bird  
 but an incomplete moan  
 in an unknown form  
 of the subjunctive plusquam perfectum.

**THE HUNT**

Listen to the breathing woods for the sign  
 I go armed into the thicket  
 all men go armed into the thicket

crisp leaves crack in the bushes  
 I stop with pounding heart  
 all men stop with pounding hearts

a rabbit starts and runs for cover  
 hunt  
 I move fast shooting  
 kill  
 all men move fast shooting

I bound in the trance of the hunt  
 my muscles tighten blood rushes  
 hearing my ancestors' warcry

anxious to show their might  
 eager for glory in battle  
 the forest yields to the hunt

the rabbit sits  
 stop  
 steady  
 I aim at its wide brown eyes  
 and see in phyletic infidelity  
 life living like me

rabbit run.

**THE FALL:  
FOR AN AMBITIOUS FRIEND**

The last mirrored fall  
of the brown leaf to the green pond  
is a brown leaf falling  
a green-brown leaf rising  
to this brown, crinkled leaf  
on this green, smooth pond.

The leaf moves,  
the pond has tiny wrinkles;  
I forget trees, sap, rain, springs  
and even neglect to hope  
for a green leaf in a clear pond.

**NORDIC NIGHT**

Why alley cat  
staccato silence from the night  
mew, and to the silent  
pre-dawn undulations of the barley seas  
dance your tail slow, cobra-like  
and follow over the hill  
us out of our time  
into the cats-eye yellow sky  
where the jade ocean waves  
rise with descending light breez-  
zing toward dawn this tilting stage  
which rubs the static blotched  
and blushing sky?

Why cat mew  
and leave us in the rising sea?  
Go find your dark stove corner  
we have no shelter errand  
our goal is now  
vibrant with us  
lovers from the night  
parting at dawn  
with night.



**WAKING DREAMS**

Come with me into my dream;  
 I am the figure on the dream's far wall  
 that creeps into a dark and gold-framed space—  
 creeps eagerly, searching  
 like a bee into an unknown flower,  
 like a death-lean snake into a rodent's hole.

Some waking sights are charged with feelings  
 like such dreams  
 here, too, I feel the frame and crawl into it—  
 into fireflies at night in dripping woods,  
 into grey-domed tombs of  
 drowned sea turtles  
 on the beach;  
 into the diving osprey over dawn's calm bay;  
 and into borealis lights that sweep the  
 western peaks.

Then I stop, drawn, hushed;  
 then my blood rushes and my skin extends  
 beyond me:  
 I feel the image in the darkened frame  
 when I find the mirror only I can see.

There, I flare my northern lights  
 and silhouette them with my pines,  
 I swim, a mullet on its placid nest,  
 I fly, a diving osprey,  
 I drown in nets and decompose,  
 sandblasted on the beach,  
 I dimly dance, alight in steaming, darkest night.

Since I have sucked the honey,  
 devoured the burrow's life,  
 now leap with me into the frame  
 and find your mirror there  
 when the world becomes our waking dreams.

**SEARCH FOR THE FOREST FIRE**

Camp on the bluff  
 overlooking the salt marsh  
 where vivid grass  
 stands tall in rich, black mud.

Turn away from its glare,  
 its ebbing tide, and walk  
 into the still and ancient woods,  
 through parchment rustlings  
 of palmetto fronds  
 and grassy clearings  
 scored with armadillo trails,  
 under the canopy of oak  
 and monolithic holly trees.

See shadows deepen,  
 hear gusts run overhead.

Then enter a new clearing  
 where only spears, charred sticks  
 point at the clouds  
 and let your boots crunch cinders.  
 Smell the wetted charcoal ash  
 among palmetto trunks  
 blackened like dead snakes,  
 their scales burned off,  
 half in the ground, half out.  
 Imagine how they writhed,  
 then stiffened.  
 Some flick their broad and pleated tongues;  
 garishly, irreverently, brightly green,  
 they fan the deadened air;  
 luminous, they double the faint light  
 and order with their perfect form  
 the energies of lightning fires.

Return to camp the way you came  
 to see the tide, now full,  
 the river, calm  
 while golden rings of jumping fish  
 expand to the green shores.

**DANE GRAVES**

Stone ships cannot be moved  
 stone vessels cannot float  
 stones set in arid hills  
 can only settle deeper—stay stone  
 raised by faith in winds  
 that blow to richer fields  
 but cannot move the stones  
 plowed from fertile fields  
 stone heavy memory of ritual  
 stone stand against strong winds  
 that carry lighter vessels out to sea.

**I SCALE THE FISH**

Fluted shields  
 stick to the back of my hand.  
 I hold one up to the light and see  
 thin bronze of murky dawns,  
 translucent grey lake-fog,  
 and a blue on the scalloped edge  
 elusive as fleeing blue-jays' wings.  
 They fly off and leave the skin of the bass  
 quivering, frayed, colorless,  
 and me, armored.

**TEN**

When I was ten,  
I disappeared in the flower bed  
under the beech, next to the locust.

We sat hunkered under clods hung and falling  
from branches and boards.

We had dug to our own depth  
and built a fire in our own earth stove.

I would snake through the hatch,  
the heel of my hand slipping on the clay brink,  
and slide to the burlap floor.

Here, the funky earth smell and the acrid smoke  
of papers and damp twigs afire  
became our sacraments.

We would sit hidden, quiet, warm—  
the only sign to the adult world,  
the swirling smoke mingling  
above with winter fog.

**OAK**

Oak, what could you say  
of time's leaves falling,  
of the sap of lives  
run out and budded  
into your concentric heart?

**WOODS CAGES**

free nightingales sing cagesongs  
to their jailed mates

woods songs  
green songs flower  
wings wild strike  
bars break plumes beak  
throats burst singing for an echo

or force  
still flying  
silent singing

wings stiffen  
throats shrink singing

caged freedom makes  
woods cages.

**TOUCHES**

Throw marbles up into the air  
and see them float away  
in their own translucent  
light refracting  
cloud swirling array

hear echoes from receding marble flocks  
diffuse infinitely,  
mingle totally  
into softly subtle tunes  
of light like touches  
of time,  
of the vague patterns of beings  
when I feel them.

**NOTHING BUT SOIL**

Nothing left except a sense of the necessity  
 for reconstruction,  
 nothing but soil  
 and a doubt of its own indigenous seed  
 and a fear  
 of the limitations of cultivation  
 -the sumac, scarlet, assertive-  
 the barrenness of produce  
 -rabbit tobacco like eager velvet-  
 the sterility of fruits  
 -crabapples and thick-shelled hickory nuts-  
 my unsoiled hands,  
 my settled rump,  
 my idle back-  
 stir  
 as my steel blade cuts grinding into hope  
 -cherry trees and rows of corn.

**OUR WAR**

Quick attacks on flanks in fog  
 withdrawal through dense woods  
 diversionary movements with divisions  
 and petty skirmishes in open fields  
 sounds of breaking camp in rain  
 to fool the other side.  
 Only afterwards  
 played out, prayed out  
 exhausted past pain we learned  
 the fools who fooled the fools—the enemy  
 had withdrawn.

**ZOOJUNGLECUBES**

One meter by one meter by one meter  
 cubes of rain forest  
 line darkened rooms at the zoo  
 showing one side through glass.  
 Away from the public's view,  
 each cube's chart reads,  
 "cage-born, delicate life-form;  
 inspect frequently; water twice a day."

Identical as we must look to them,  
 green boas drape on cut-off branches,  
 still as pictures.

They are spared our silly banter:  
 "Are they alive?"  
 "Did someone paint them?"  
 "Are they real?"  
 "They look like china figurines."  
 "Wouldn't it be neat to have one for a pet?"

Our words betray us. Because  
 we have no other gauge to use but us,  
 their subtle uniqueness defeats us  
 like their looks from curated jungles  
 go through us.

We scarcely understand the keeper's orders:  
 Water twice today;  
 give oxygen tomorrow.

**POETS**

Poets are loose with words,  
 playing like children  
 with kittens and flowers.

Poets are tight with words,  
 meting them out  
 like misers give gold.

Poets are ambitious for words,  
 building lines like rockets  
 for star-trips.

Poets are coy with words,  
 holding their treasures  
 like virgins.

Poets are brash with words,  
 shouting and strutting  
 like bragging boys.

Poets live their words,  
 living when words live,  
 dying as words die.

Poets are singers,  
 possessed with their bodies' music,  
 attuned to the bone.

**THE STRANDED CATFISH SPEAKS**

I have crawled  
 from the sea  
 to the beach.  
 Now I see all:  
 The waves no fish  
 has seen to tell,  
 the sun no eye  
 can see again.

New dry water  
 sucks my life  
 cracks scales  
 moves sand  
 lifts foam  
 sends odors.  
 The crab calls it wind.

It is my old friend:  
 rocker of waters,  
 pusher of waves,  
 Queen of all Changes.

He sings her song:  
 "Open your mouth  
 to the beach-wind of change,  
 give of yourself, let go."

The ghost crab—  
 I just call him Ghost now—  
 arrived soon after I settled.  
 He walked up my tail  
 to my dorsal fin, bowed,  
 bending eye stalks and feelers,  
 said, "salaam and welcome,"  
 said, "I am a priest of change."

My dorsal fin trembled.  
 Ghost silently listened,  
 then sidled down, bowing,  
 started his digging,  
 piling sand on my tail.

He said,  
 "I build my home near food."

**THE NOTE OF OUR CONTENTMENT**

Listen:  
 This is the note  
 of our contentment:  
 played pink and purple  
 in a simple bowl of glass:  
 Look at this flower of pastel dawning:  
 Imagine that I blow  
 with the help of the sun  
 this bowl of glass,  
 that it shatters and melts  
 and rolls as marbles  
 into the pockets of boys  
 who feel suddenly richer  
 than any of their parents'  
 most extravagant dreams.

Then Sunday morning  
 they circle in secret  
 behind the ballpark  
 to invent games  
 with spheres of pink and purple  
 and the laughter of play  
 that sounds that note again.

That breezy note of pure content  
 hums in the circle  
 of eight-year-old marble masters  
 who create their own astrology  
 to account for the patterns  
 of losers and winners  
 as they shoot and scatter  
 and gather these marbles,  
 both purple and pink  
 and then pool all as winnings  
 into the bowl again.

Now you know.  
 Do you know now  
 why I tap it and listen  
 when you ask me about that bowl  
 kept through moves between continents  
 and distant cities?  
 Listen: I'll tap it again.  
 Listen for that note again—  
 that note of our contentment.

**THE OLD PARSON**

He waits for stillness among ticking clocks.  
 Above him, an antique's long hand  
 quivers, then numbers another minute;  
 its hour hand points  
 to the family Bible, surrounded  
 by embroidered messages of hope  
 while its shiny disk  
 oscillates slowly in the dark.

Now time has paused in his cloudy eyes  
 that no longer follow the pendulum's swing  
 but turn inward to the rhythms  
     of remembered song.  
 Limp hands on crocheted doilies  
 reach into seamless eternity,  
 failing to grasp when required,  
 the handshakes of time-bound guests.

After mumbled grace and reluctant eating,  
 he drops a soup-stained napkin  
 on his way to the study.  
 Here, books of sermons, concordances,  
 and commentaries gather dust  
 around his desk, littered with parts  
 and tools for repairing clocks.

He whittles wooden dowels  
 and caresses the brass while counting cogs.  
 He polishes a silver pendulum  
 with a distant, beaming smile,  
 for he sees himself riding the golden, pendular orb  
 while another clock-mender tunes the works.  
 He knows he can hear when the ticking is right,  
 and he knows this perfection will cause it to cease  
 when he rides the final, endless swing  
 that becomes being,  
 cogless, tickless, and weightless,  
 mending his time forever.

**PERSIMMON**

High overhead, next to the road  
 I think I see persimmons ripen,  
 their dotted silhouettes  
 like the scrambled notes  
 of my discordant whistling.  
 Distance takes their color  
 and cold, grey air their scent.

But since I know they fall,  
 I stoop under the tree and root,  
 find briars, leaves, and stalks,  
 deer tracks and dying fern—no fruit.

Deep in the woods  
 far from the road  
 buck spoor reveals a seed:  
 Whole, brown, and shining,  
 it arrests me in the buck's tracks  
 where I stand entranced  
 and imagine how it is to be a deer,  
 to smell the ripe fruit in the wind  
 and find it in decaying leaves  
 and eat this autumn's sweetmeat  
 then blend into the trees and leaves  
 with persimmon color in my fur.

I leave my boot prints  
 and a whistled song, now tuned.



**NIGHT FLIGHT**

As they watch the signs flick off,  
 hear seatbelts click  
 and ice cubes clatter,  
 smoke swirls toward vents,  
 and little boxes of night glide by—

below on a dirt road in Georgia,  
 we follow a firefly's light  
 as it gently pokes through  
 the absolute darkness of hardwoods;  
 we hear the whippoorwill's rhythmic shout  
 stitching its silver web  
 through the night-shrouded warp  
 of galloping horses.

Only the star-filled eyes of a fox  
 discover our quiet figures  
 as it hurries from wood to field.  
 When we glance again at Orion,  
 his belt buckle blinks.

**SACRED SPRING  
 OF THE CHEROKEE**

Water draws us  
 with the thousand feet  
 this spring has seen before—  
 all pilgrims to the mythic depth  
 beyond reflections,  
 where the voices  
 of the oak and poplar,  
 of the limestone,  
 and of clouds  
 murmur  
 the anthem of our tribe.

**PHT PHT PHT**

Is poetry the pht-pht-pht  
 the pht-pht-pht of power poles  
 passed in a car with open windows?  
 And is it the irregular growth of woods  
 along a meandering trail?

Both lead to the sacred grove  
 where I say my words out loud,  
 where the sun-curved lines of leaves,  
 the wind-worn, rain-washed earth  
 throw back my shout-  
 altered, scattered, and bent, absorbed.  
 Is this answer it?  
 And is the silence it?  
 Pht-pht-pht.

**TURTLE BONE**

Your calcium cell walls  
 bear imprints of many lives,  
 tales of millenia's forms.  
 All of you tells of the rest,  
 nothing swims alone.  
 Your jagged edges are for joining,  
 your smoothness for embracing flesh.  
 In the shell of many parts,  
 your flying buttress bone  
 holds to the spine of it all.

**PEACE**

Well, neighbor, this land lies barren  
 where we've paced back and forth,  
 and weed-choked everywhere else.

I'm proud that we've negotiated,  
 that we haven't fought,  
 that no blood has been shed  
 on our disputed boundary line.

Our talk does seem like peace  
 when war is everywhere,  
 and though this talk is easy,  
 I'm tired of talking about peace.

Let's stop talking about peace.  
 That word is so heavy with morals,  
 and so light with abstractions.  
 Let's stop talking about peace.

Come, let's get my mattock and your shovel,  
 and let's sow marigolds and onions  
 in the trenches we dig together  
 across the boundaries of our past.

**WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?**

What is this about—  
 the land that stretches  
 through my long, lone drives  
 from city to city?  
 What is it about?

Is it about the leaves  
 speaking in wind sighs  
 of the land's emotions?

What is this about—  
 the brown cattle knee-deep  
 in yellow flowers?

Is it about the flowers  
 singing into the mouths of cattle  
 and the cows secreting  
 the tunes in their milk.

What is this about—  
 my driving through, not stopping?

It is about a greening,  
 it is about a flowering,  
 it is about singing.

Where is it?  
 Where am I?

**BLIND RUN**

Dunes glow under Venus,  
surf breaks in Orion where  
moonlit foam slides, clings,  
lets go on the beach that curves into night.

I shut out the moon,  
I blindfold myself and run,  
run down the beach as fast as I can.

In that sprint into darkness  
dunes and stars explode away,  
waves only murmur where Orion was;  
each step is fast surprise  
of sand. It yields and strikes at my feet.

I leave what I know,  
reduced to muscle and breath  
in the tunnel where walls appear  
and disappear, making my legs delay and let go.  
Now on an edge, I collide,  
    splashing, with Orion,  
then turn and run to the tunnel's end where  
time spirals away, place ticks to a halt.

I fall on Venus,  
sand mingles with salt in my mouth;  
the Bear is very still above the glossy sea;  
I ride the dune toward its stars.

**CYCLING IN SCOTLAND**

One morning clouds drive  
valley-down, hill-over rain,  
spare as the Scottish soul  
and insistent;  
it sings in my tires,  
strokes my face.

Up the long, flat valley road  
I cycle in drizzle;  
cows stare and chew,  
workmen persist in digging;  
all fellows we are in the rain,  
scornful of cars,  
drivers lost from rain and wind  
who see no flocks of cloud-greys.

When the break comes ahead,  
I am awed to the tune of humming wheels  
and of blood pistoned into my senses  
to see sudden light on far mountains,  
greys become green,  
black lakes become silver.

I roll into changing light.

**UPHILL FLOWERS**

All I see is uphill flowers.  
 For all I know, the downhill's barren  
 except for blurs and streaks.

Out of the rush and up from the dip,  
 flowers show like shooting stars  
 that glow into our heavy air  
 from vacant space.

I slow down to catch up  
 with these small worlds  
 and see this flock of stars  
 on stalks, of petals stretched  
 for sun and nodding to my labored breath  
 as I pedal uphill again.

**SEE STONEHENGE**

Pay for your ticket  
 clutch it and show  
 pass under the road  
 climb the paved path  
 walk slowly around  
 follow the rope  
 let your foot-falls count.

Block the traffic's noise  
 hear only the wind  
 smell only the grass and the dung  
 see the wreck of the stones  
 feel the rhythms of rock  
 lean, stand, and lie  
 heft the compaction of soil  
 lift millenia's weight.

Break the circle of rope  
 call on the priestess to stand  
 let her goddess tell  
 show the light of the stone  
 chant the stone of the earth  
 dance the earth of the sun.

Pass under the road  
 buy souvenirs of bronze  
 let them dangle on your breast.

**FERRYMAN**

I'm a ferryman  
sole crew and captain of a trough of guts,

a dug-out  
hatchless and rudderless  
eaten out by fire.

I flail my oars  
at screaming gulls.

**PLAY ON, MARSYAS**

*Their eyes mid many wrinkles, their eyes,  
Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay.*

W. B. Yeats, *Lapis Lazuli*

Play on, Marsyas  
as though you knew  
Pan's jealous wish for you  
and Apollo's cruelty.  
Play on as though you knew  
that only singers and players,  
that only poets survive  
and that Apollo must be outsung  
or the poet flayed alive.

Play on because you know  
that in the song's breath  
and in the tune's air  
the here and the now, are gay.

**IBIS IN FLORIDA**

“Sweet is the truth”  
 Egyptians would say  
 on the day of Thoth,  
 Ibis-headed judge of gods.

Next time you look at a bird,  
 remember this, remember this:  
 That in the Egyptian Book of the Dead—  
 a book for the living, a book about us—  
 a bird’s feather lies in one balance bowl,  
 in the other, your heart.

Come with me to tide-flats,  
 enter the world of mud,  
 with white-winged Ibis  
 in Florida’s mud land,  
 curve-beaked and crying Ibis.  
 Relax your binoculars, see.  
 Let your mythic eye see.  
 Isaiah saw seraphim  
 guarding the throne of God.  
 You see ibis feeding in mud;  
 Egyptians made gods of ibis  
 who judge the gods with a feather;  
 god-ibis probe the mud for food.

And the god-judge-ibis intones:  
 mud-food-feeding  
 beak-feather-being  
 flock-roosting-flying.

In Florida  
 with the sacred Ibis  
 I am Isaiah seeing angels.

When I clap my hands,  
 the flock leaps,  
 becoming twilight seraphim,  
 crying urgently together,  
 winging for the crescent moon.

Sweet is the truth—  
 light as a feather.

**MY ONLY DISCIPLE**

An old and dimly remembered acquaintance  
 travelling the coast  
 braved the wasteland, crossed  
 to the deserted fortress in the sand hills.  
 He greeted me with reverence. Chanting,  
 recited to the resurrected the dead man’s songs.

So whether you believe in reincarnation or not, or  
 re-birth, or the myriad mutations of the fruitfly ...

Our late beloved teacher  
 is buried under the ruins of a desert war  
 whose rebels took no prisoners.  
 Here, only we survive:  
 The master of yesterday’s oasis and me,  
 The aged apprentice keeper  
 of the desert temple.

**SEQUOYAH**

Straining for a foot-hold,  
I labored toward the brow of the mountain  
hidden under trees and mist,  
beyond stone bowls  
of old rain, behind stinging barriers.

I emerged on a pine-needle ledge.  
Below, ridges lay like furrows,  
the city strutted, suburbs oozed to the river  
winding like a snake into Moccasin Bend.

The sun warmed me to sleep there on the mountain  
until shadows shifted, and waking  
eye to death-seeking eye with a hovering buzzard,  
I stirred. He luffed into the darkening wind  
of my sleep.

I saw him circling over the river, downstream  
the mountain behind him now.  
I saw myself in a canoe  
with an old Cherokee warrior.

“On this rock,” I heard him say,  
“my mother gave me to the river at dawn;  
in her arms I was dipped seven times in the river  
and became the river’s warrior and its voice.”

He paddled us silently out.  
Floating with the river, he said:  
“The long mountains that brood in the darkness  
before us, behind us,  
are dead warriors  
stunned like eagles cast from the rocks  
and from the high misty air that swirled  
as it danced with the sacred flames.  
Now I see flames only in foundries’ chimneys.

“That stony ground of the high, holy places,  
this red clay of our fields  
were cursed as a vale of tears.  
Spirits of the air, our shaman’s messengers,  
were shot because they saw, soaring so high.

“You look sad,  
but I could pull my hair, cut my flesh, dance  
in the flickering fire on the dying earth.  
Look, the infidel Christian destroyers  
cut these mangled hands  
because the fingers that are gone  
wrote signs in the language of the spirit’s people.  
They branded with fire this mark on my forehead.”

He moved white hair from a thumb-broad welt  
dyed by the color lost from his face.  
I remember turning away  
only to see on the bow pointing with the river  
deer and eagles painted with colors  
of sumac and bark.



“Do not flinch and turn away,” he said.  
 “I show you yourself;  
 your blackcoats marked me,  
 but the fire that burns my brow is sacred;  
 it lit the pipes in the water dance:  
 I remember my tribe going to the water  
 around the fire, seven times before dawn ...  
 I see a ring of men ... seven priests dancing,  
 moving against the circling of the white man’s  
 clocks,  
 the tribe coming together, breathing smoke  
 toward the birthplace of the sun  
 when we raised the great fire spirit in the river.

“There—beautiful as the red hawk,  
 slow as the stalking panther—I danced there  
 on that stony slope just coming into view.  
 And when the sun rose, we knew what we were  
 with the river, with the mountain and crows—  
 we knew.  
 Look at the ragged crows caw-cawing  
 over the lead-grey river: they know.  
 And the river knows ... see ... see  
 the river-swell is pregnant  
 with musselshell-grey dawn.

“Now look up there: only the buzzards’ wings have day  
 sun-bright white feathers seen from below.  
 I saw them the night before the great attack  
 in a dark cave on this side  
 of our hunting ground you call Lookout Mountain.  
 Only the buzzards caught the message of that day:  
 All was dark except these circling suns: a canopy,  
 a soaring cloth of death that follows us and the river  
 like a shaman’s vision.

“Yes, the river curves and embraces the mountain here.  
 Old warriors say the spirit can keep circling here  
 like the river forever wandering, bending.  
 Here, the white men came:  
 corn burned, cattle died,  
 apples rotted with bodies of kinsmen  
 killed by blackcoat preachers.

“Here in a dream,  
 I saw a white buzzard  
 riding the shoulders of a warrior riding west  
 with bare head, bare feet  
 in a white ceremonial buckskin, on a red horse.  
 Children and women were crying of hunger  
 while the warrior cried ka-ka-ka  
 and rode west into a cloud of white.

“I have fled west, a marked man;  
 I have taught the signs of the Old Ones to all my people.  
 But I have returned to float with the river.

“I would curse the white man,  
 but he is dead as the mountains die in white men’s hands.  
 As the hawk-cries vanish from the heart  
 and the fire is trapped.  
 But the river flows on—  
 I flow on ...  
 Listen to the river ...  
 ... no, sit still—I do not need you though I tremble.  
 ... the sun,  
 the sun ... I see the sun.”

Below, the empty river winds like a snake  
 in swirling mist and feeble light,  
 but as I turn toward the city,  
 as I mount the rocks of the brow  
 I hear the cries of mating hawks.

**Notes**

WD= included in *Waking Dreams*, the series and performance show of original poetry and photography by Finn Bille.

1. *Speak* 1988(?) Chattanooga, published in *Art of Living*, June 1990. WD.
2. *Order*, inspired by a visit to the dunes of Nag's Head, North Carolina; published in *Credo* 1973.
3. *Dictionary Allegorette* 1985(?) Chattanooga.
4. *Floating Abalone* 1971 Atlanta. My metaphor for sensitivity; published in *Credo* 1973.
5. *Opening Day* 1985(?) Baylor School, specifically the parapet wall at the library, overlooking the Tennessee River.
6. *Americans on Everest, or Goddess Mother* 1986(?) Baylor School.
7. *The Wilderness Hike* 1980 Chattanooga. One perceptive reader returned this poem to me with a puzzled look. For him, the oxymoron, "embittered by flowers" was too radical.
8. *Postcard to My Mother* 1983(?) Dog Island, Florida.
9. *Canterbury, England* 1982 from my bicycle trip following the route of Chaucer's pilgrims. WD.
10. *Still Photographer* 1975 Atlanta.
11. *Chimunga the Boss Bird* 1972-73 Atlanta. Based on "African Wildlife" in *National Geographic*, February 1972, and *Birds of Prey of the World* by Grossman and Hamlet, Charles Potter, 1964 about the bateleur eagle, *therathopius ecaudatus*. Dancers from the Dance Theater Workshop once danced this poem at Baylor School; published in *Credo* 1974.
12. *Victory* 1973. Written for myself as consolation for the possible failure of exams, and as a victory in itself. In *Sahara*, Summer 1974, The Atlanta Poets Number.
13. *Astrology* 1975(?) Atlanta. The "cluttered kitchen" is our very small culinary laboratory in the apartment on Charles Allen Drive.
14. *Wanderings* 1973(?) Atlanta.
15. *Spring* 1976(?) Atlanta.
16. *Dancers* 1976(?) Atlanta. A poem of deliberate grandiloquence; published with no title in *Credo* 1974.
17. *Premonitory Actor* 1970(?) Atlanta.
18. *L.A.* 1972 Atlanta. "Subjunctive plusquam perfectum" is an echo from my language classes in Denmark, in which all grammar terms were Latin. I meant this to mean the conditional past perfect, the "maybe had been." Published in *Credo* 1973.
19. *The Hunt* 1973 Trion, Georgia; published in *Credo* 1973.

20. *The Fall* 1973 Atlanta. In *Sahara*, Summer 1974, The Atlanta Poets Number.
21. *Nordic Night* 1968 Denmark. A real experience of a very light Nordic night in the country near my mother's house at Flakkebjerg.
22. *Waking Dreams* 1984(?)  
Enumerates actual experiences in nature.
23. *Search For The Forest Fire, or Green and Black* 1986(?)  
Description of my solo backpack to Cumberland Island, Georgia, in the summer of 1983. The Park Service's handling of the natural fire that had burned there the year before had been controversial. I went to have a look. Printed in *Periaktoi* Spring 1983 and in *Tamarisk Letters: the Answer Mark* 1983. WD.
24. *Dane Graves* 1968(?) Setting: Lindholm Høje just north of Nørresundby, Denmark, my birthplace. Based on my understanding of the Viking belief that ship graves helped the dead sail to the land of the dead. WD.
25. *I Scale The Fish* 1969(?) Setting: Trion, Georgia and a real experience of fishing, scaling, and examining the scales of a bass.
26. *Ten* 1983(?) Chattanooga. Setting: the front garden of Høstvej 4, in Lyngby, a suburb of Copenhagen, where I lived from age 6 til 11, when my family immigrated to the U.S. In *Periaktoi* Spring 1982.
27. *Oak* 1985(?) Baylor School. The poem was written during a creative writing workshop with students. It refers to the great red Oak growing on the Baylor campus and thought to be the largest in Tennessee. The poem, engraved in copper, can be seen on the inside of the door to the interior of the Earthtree, the environmental sculpture by Peter Henley; published in *Art of Living* June 1990.
28. *Woods Cages* 1967 Copenhagen.
29. *Touches* 1968 Copenhagen. In *Sahara*, Summer 1974, The Atlanta Poets Number.
30. *Nothing but Soil* 1973 Atlanta. in *Sahara*, Summer 1974, The Atlanta Poets Number.
31. *Our War* 1970(?) Atlanta.
32. *Zoojunglecubes* 1990 Chattanooga. In 1989 I visited the Herpatology department of the National Zoo in Washington DC. Head keeper Bela Demeter showed me around behind the public area, where a row of cages with green boas especially intrigued me.
33. *Poets* 1990 Chattanooga.  
For my writing students at Walker Tech.
34. *The Stranded Catfish Speaks, Louisiana* 1986(?)  
The coast of the southern-most tip of Louisiana seemed surreal to me. Oil company helicopters clattered from supply base to drilling platforms, and dead fish littered the beaches. The extremely short lines are an experiment with a kind of incantatory poetry.
35. *The Note of Our Contentment* 1990 Chattanooga.  
To my wife, Jeanne.
36. *The Old Parson* 1990 Chattanooga. The parson is the Rev. J. Hamby Barton, grandfather of my friend Doug Robinson. The poem appears in *The Phone Rang Again*, the second volume of the memoirs of my favorite lady of many years, Grandma Barton, the Reverend's widow, who died in 1993.
37. *Persimmon* 1990 Chattanooga. Written with and for my creative Writing class, the Persimmon Class, at Walker Tech. See the appendix for revisions of this poem.
38. *Night Flight, Cloudland, Georgia* 1987(?)
39. *Sacred Spring* 1988 Chattanooga. The spring is the sacred spring of the Cherokee at Red Clay, Tennessee. A sign at the spring informs us that this spring was believed to be an entrance to the underworld. Written to go with the photograph of the same title or the alternative title, "The Path to the Sacred Spring." This poem/color photo combination is available framed from Finn Bille Enterprises, or at an art/book shop. It hangs in the Visitors' Center at Red Clay State Park.

40. *Pht Pht Pht* 1988 Chattanooga.
41. *Turtle Bone* 1988(?) Chattanooga.  
Describes a carapace bone of a loggerhead turtle found on Cumberland Island GA. The turtle had probably been drowned in a shrimp net.
42. *Peace* 1988(?) Chattanooga. I wrote this poem for the Power of Unity Conference for interracial understanding, where I also read it. Also entitled, "Peace: A Conversation at the Back Property Line." Published in *Art of Living* April 1991.
43. *What is This About?* 1987 Chattanooga.
44. *Blind Run* 1984(?) Chattanooga.  
Describes a night activity of several trips to the coast of Cumberland and Sapelo Islands, Georgia.
45. *Cycling in Scotland* 1983 Chattanooga. From my 1982 bicycle trip in the Scottish highlands; printed in *Periaktoi*, Spring 1984. WD.
46. *Uphill Flowers* 1983 Setting: the Kettle Moraine country of Wisconsin. I took my bike on a two-week seminar at the High Wind Farm. Published in *Windwatch*, the farm community's magazine, and in *Periaktoi*, Spring 1984. WD.
47. *Stonehenge* 1986 Chattanooga. Dedicated to and written for my mother, Nich Rosquist, this poem came directly from a visit at Stonehenge with her during our trip to England in 1986. The monument was literally roped off. The last lines attempt to convey my intuitive understanding of my mother's fascination with the imagined presences there.
48. *Ferryman* 1971 Atlanta. Incorporated into a wood-cut print by Atlanta artist, Charles Mitchell 1980.
49. *Play on, Marsyas* 1973 Atlanta. The mythological reference is to the Marsyas who, according to Bullfinch, found the flute thrown to Earth by Minerva. Marsyas played wonderfully, and challenged Apollo to a musical contest. He was flayed alive when he lost the contest.
50. *Ibis in Florida* 1987-90 Chattanooga.  
The setting is Sanibel Island, Florida. WD
51. *My Only Disciple* 1968(?) Copenhagen.  
Written after an acquaintance from America visited and quoted my own poetry to me.
52. *Sequoyah* 1976-79 Atlanta. Written in a writers' group at Georgia State University. Our self-imposed assignment was to write a dramatic monologue. An historian at GSU criticized me severely for using a biography that he thought was historically spurious.

## REVISION:

*Introduction to the seven versions of Persimmon.*

In a way we are all poets, and the spontaneous verbal outpourings accepted without change can be delightful and even beautiful. Such expressions can also be seen as sketches for a finished work.

The craft of poetry is revision. In retrospect, it is strange that I didn't change my first poetic efforts. Then I met Larry Rubin (*The World's Old Way* 1962, *Lanced in Light* 1967, *All My Mirrors Lie* 1975), on board a ship crossing the Atlantic in 1966. He asked me about my revisions. Revisions? These are just the way I wrote them, I told him. I think I had a notion of a kind of sanctity of the inspired word, encouraged by my fundamentalist, Bible-believing religious background. I've found the same attitude in many of my students. It is an immature, self-centered attitude. Larry Rubin talked about his many revisions and the craft of revision. When I started revising, I became a poet—a craftsman of words. This collection starts at that point in my development as a writer.

Revision—crafting a poem—is a wonderfully absorbing activity for me. This work and play has been a great solace to me, and has provided a much-needed counterpoint to the rigors of graduate school and the demands of various jobs. Always a poem has engaged me fully and with absolute honesty. I always have felt that any writing that I thought was a poem had both a ritualistic music of its own and a deep truth for me that I felt could be experienced by others. The purpose of my revisions is to come as close to that music and that truth as I can.

The following versions of the poem *Persimmon* illustrate the process of revision as I practice it. It is not the poem in this collection that has been revised the most, but it is the first one I revised on a computer, saving the versions as I revised. Other poems in this collection have been revised as many as twenty times on paper, while some have been revised only once or twice.

**PERSIMMON: 1**

1 High there overhead  
 2 Persimmons ripen, I guess. I guess  
 3 I see their dotted (profile) silhouettes  
 4 like scrambled music notes.  
 5 but not their color, (not their smell),  
 6 and (the) cold grey air keeps their scent.  
 7 But since I know they fall  
 8 stoop under the tree and root,  
 9 (I) find briars (and) leaves, sticks,  
 10 deer tracks, and dying fern, no fruit.

11 Deeper in the woods (farther on, later on)  
 12 I find a shiny seed in spoor.  
 13 (in spoor whose feast I envy)  
 14 (no sweet meat, no fruity scent, but spoor)  
 15 I stand there in the buck's tracks  
 16 The doe sucked the sweet meat  
 17 and the deer inhaled the fruit scent  
 18 content and knowing,  
 19 hides his going with color of its shiny fur  
 20 walking home, I leave my boot prints  
 21 and a whistle, tuned.

**PERSIMMON: 2**

1 High overhead, next to the road  
 2 I think I see persimmons ripen  
 3 their dotted silhouettes  
 4 like scrambled music notes.  
 5 Distance takes their color  
 6 and cold, grey air their scent.  
 7 But since I know they fall  
 8 stoop under the tree and root,  
 9 I find briars, leaves, and stalks,  
 10 deer tracks, and dying fern—no fruit.

11 Deep in the woods  
 12 far from the road  
 13 I find a shiny seed in spoor.  
 14 I stand there in the buck's tracks  
 15 and know he sucked sweet meat  
 16 inhaled the fruity scent,  
 17 hides his going  
 18 with persimmon color in his fur.

19 I leave my boot prints  
 20 and a whistled song, now tuned.

**PERSIMMON:3**

- 1 High overhead, next to the road
- 2 I think I see persimmons ripen,
- 3 their dotted silhouettes
- 4 like scrambled music notes.
- 5 Distance takes their color
- 6 and cold, grey air their scent.
  
- 7 But since I know they fall
- 8 I stoop under the tree and root,
- 9 find briars, leaves, and stalks,
- 10 deer tracks, and dying fern—no fruit.
  
- 11 Deep in the woods
- 12 far from the road
- 13 I find a shiny seed in spoor.
- 14 I squat there in the buck's tracks
- 15 and know he sucked sweet meat,
- 16 inhaled the fruity scent,
- 17 and that he hides his going
- 18 with persimmon color in his fur.
  
- 19 I leave my boot prints
- 20 and a whistled song, now tuned.

**PERSIMMON:4**

- 1 High overhead, next to the road
- 2 I think I see persimmons ripen,
- 3 their dotted silhouettes
- 4 like scrambled music notes.
- 5 Distance takes their color
- 6 and cold, grey air their scent.
  
- 7 But since I know they fall,
- 8 I stoop under the tree and root,
- 9 find briars, leaves, and stalks,
- 10 deer tracks and dying fern—no fruit.
  
- 11 Deep in the woods
- 12 far from the road
- 13 buck spoor reveals a seed:
- 14 Whole, brown, and shining,
- 15 It arrests me in the buck's tracks
- 16 to suck with him sweet meat,
- 17 inhale the fruity scent,
- 18 and hide like a buck
- 19 with persimmon color in his fur.
  
- 20 I leave my boot prints
- 21 and a whistled song, not tuned.



**PERSIMMON:5**

- 1 High overhead, next to the road
- 2 I think I see persimmons ripen,
- 3 their dotted silhouettes
- 4 like scrambled music notes.
- 5 Distance takes their color
- 6 and cold, grey air their scent.
  
- 7 But since I know they fall,
- 8 I stoop under the tree and root,
- 9 find briars, leaves, and stalks,
- 10 deer tracks and dying fern—no fruit.
  
- 11 Deep in the woods
- 12 far from the road
- 13 buck spoor reveals a seed:—
- 14 Whole, brown, and shining,
- 15 It arrests me in the buck's tracks—
- 16 to suck with him sweet meat, —
- 17 inhale the fruity scent,
- 18 blend into the woods
- 19 like this buck
- 20 with persimmon color in his fur.
  
- 21 I leave my boot prints
- 22 and a whistled song, now tuned.

Comment: line 16 sounds artificial and even unsavory in a distractingly sexual way. Why not be more direct about imagining the identification instead of this forced identity? First I played around with the lines and then incorporated them, revised again, into version 6, lines 15-22.

- 16 WHERE I BECOME THE DEER
- 16 where I imagine how he
- 16 where I stand in a trance
- 16 where I stand entranced
- 17 and imagine how it is to be a deer,
- 18.2 to find the fruit by faintest scent
- 19.2 and eat the season's sweetmeat

**PERSIMMON:6**

- 1 High overhead, next to the road
- 2 I think I see persimmons ripen,
- 3 their dotted silhouettes
- 4 like scrambled music notes.
- 5 Distance takes their color
- 6 and cold, grey air their scent.
  
- 7 But since I know they fall
- 8 I stoop under the tree and root,
- 9 find briars, leaves, and stalks,
- 10 deer tracks, and dying fern—no fruit.
  
- 11 Deep in the woods
- 12 far from the road
- 13 buck spoor reveals a seed:
- 14 Whole, brown, and shining,
- 15 it arrests me in the buck's tracks
- 16 where I stand entranced
- 17 and imagine how it is to be a deer,
- 18 to smell the ripe fruit in the wind
- 19 and find it in decaying leaves
- 20 and eat this autumn's sweetmeat
- 21 then blend into the trees and leaves
- 22 with persimmon color in my fur.
  
- 23 I leave my boot prints
- 24 and a whistled song, now tuned.

Comment: the "whistled tune" has no clear reference early in the poem. I tried to fix that in version 7 by changing line 4 and adding a new line 5.

**PERSIMMON:7**

1 High overhead, next to the road  
2 I think I see persimmons ripen,  
3 their dotted silhouettes  
4 like the scrambled notes  
5 of my discordant whistling.  
6 Distance takes their color  
7 and cold, grey air their scent.

8 But since I know they fall  
9 I stoop under the tree and root,  
10 find briars, leaves, and stalks,  
11 deer tracks, and dying fern—no fruit.

12 Deep in the woods  
13 far from the road  
14 buck spoor reveals a seed:  
15 Whole, brown, and shining,  
16 it arrests me in the buck's tracks  
17 where I stand entranced  
18 and imagine how it is to be a deer,  
19 to smell the ripe fruit in the wind  
20 and find it in decaying leaves  
21 and eat this autumn's sweetmeat  
22 then blend into the trees and leaves  
23 with persimmon color in my fur.

24 I leave my boot prints  
25 and a whistled song, now tuned.

*January 1991*