SOUL SCENES: A CLAY COLLECTION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of
English, Foreign Languages and Philosophy
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of

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by
Robin Douglas Clay
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[Signature]
Director of Thesis

Master's Committee:  [Signature], Chairman

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Robin Douglas Clay
Morehead State University, 1987

The following work is an original anthology of poetry. It is, as the title implies, a malleable collection that delves into personal and spiritual reflection. The collection allows the reader to glimpse the souls of a cross-section of speakers as they share their unique stories. It accomplishes this by utilizing various poetic forms including the sonnet, villanelle, sestina, and free and blank verse. The scenes depicted may also echo the voice of Society, as they deal with such topical issues as the plight of the farmers in "Empty Barns," the homeless in "Our Souls to Keep," and modern day divorce in "Separated." The poet has drawn from her Kentucky heritage, spiritual faith, and literary influences to create a diversified collection of unique poetry. Perhaps, by looking into
the souls of these speakers, we may look far more deeply into our own.

Accepted by: [Signature]

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Chairman
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A small, silver-haired man
With a dimpled chin and a pickled liver
Sat beside me and shivered.
And we watched the fall of withered leaves
And saw them whipped by the pond water,
For there were no pigeons to feed.

He said he didn't like pigeons, anyway.

I laid my red sweater over my shoulders
And said it was cool today.
He laid his leathered hands over his,
And said it was cold.
His veins were blue and purple,
And his nose was red and bulbous and alcoholic
And flared when a bright-eyed kid pranced by with a steamy hot dog.

He said he didn't like hot dogs, anyway.

I rustled with my belongings
And said I had an appointment to keep.
He shivered and coughed up a laugh
And said we all did.
And without looking into his eyes,
I, oh so carefully, slipped my sweater from my shoulders,
And, oh so carelessly, left it behind,
And walked away feeling rather pleased with myself.

And I heard him grumble, "I never liked red, anyway."
DESTINATION

She goes each day to meet the evening train,
And waves to the porter at the station.
He slowly smiles and shakes his head in vain,
And wonders at her sheer determination.

And one by one they tumble down the stairs,
And one by one she searches every face,
But no one seems to notice she is there,
Each intent on some important place.

Business must have made him stay away;
One more day and he'll be coming home.
She changes her excuses every day,
And then, like every day, she leaves alone.

She walks the path in silence without feeling,
So careful not to let her vision stray,
So not to see the marble stone revealing
Just where his final destination lay.

For she rejects the truth it has to say,
And sets her mind to guard against the pain,
And keeps her eyes intent upon the pathway,
And gladly goes each day to meet the train.
SEPARATED

She keeps your picture by her bed.
(The only thing in her room she dusts regularly,
    You, and a poster of some shaggy-head superstar.)

And when we argue,
    She runs to her room
    As if to tell on me.

For you are always smiling at her, approvingly,
    From your gilt-edged frame.
    Only I know that it's a posed portrait.

And you buy her things that I can't afford.
    How easy it is to give toys and hearts,
    But be gone by the time they break.

But for all the mending a mother may do . . .
    Still, yours is the picture she keeps by her bed,
    And I make her take out the trash.
SHINING

The Sun will shine His eye for me
   And welcome me to earth anew,
And I must choose what life should be.

For I am young, and I am free,
   I am not bound by what you do,
The Sun will shine His eye for me.

His light descends that I may see,
   But I must make a beacon, too,
And I must choose what life should be.

My choices are made carefully,
   Enlightened by a beam that's true,
The Sun will shine His eye for me.

And though His light streams endlessly,
   It's still as fresh as morning dew,
And I must choose what life should be.

And so I shine on faithfully,
   And try to pay the debt that's due,
The Sun will shine His eye for me,
And I must choose what life should be.
THE MINES

She packed his lunch in a rusted tin pail,
And he kissed her forehead and left
While the children slept.

She hated to think of him down in that black mouth,
That ugly, gaping mouth that swallowed men and metal,
So she busied herself with the children.

For he had convinced her that it was all for their sake.
When that hole spit up enough chunks,
They would go to college,
And never know the feeling of being surrounded by darkness,
Never spend their nights coughing up the blackness
They had unknowingly carried home,
Like he did,
Like his father did.

It was raining when it happened.
She had just finished saving the wash on the line.
She felt the rumble.

And the thick black mud made the rescue difficult,
And the tight-lipped mine made it impossible.

She packed his lunch in a rusted tin pail,
And he kissed her forehead and left
While the other children slept.
NO GUARANTEES

No, I don't want to change you.
It was that individuality
That drew me to you in the beginning.

No, I don't want to make you a copy of myself,
If I were that secure
I wouldn't be reaching out at all.

You needn't set up ground rules.
I only want to be with you,
For at least a while.

To learn from you,
Yes, to take,
But to give, also.

To write about you,
To feel about you,
For at least a while.

But if you think you need protection
From things that happened before me,
Go ahead and make the guidelines--

But I can't promise
That you'll walk away
Untouched.
IN THE FIELDS

Longer days and seasons turning,
Cutting, clearing, garden burning,
Planting season is returning
   In the Fields.

First the digging, then the sowing,
Sunny day and sprouts are showing,
One good rain and all things growing
   In the Fields.

Blossomed here and leafy there,
Shooting, stretching everywhere,
Musk of Earth perfumes the air
   In the Fields.

Rich and ripe and heavy laden,
Pulled and picked, the best are taken,
Leaving just the roots forsaken
   In the Fields.

Then one by one they die at last,
And deep into the Earth are cast,
To forge the future from the past
   In the Fields.
CONSTRUCTION

Mounds of dirt
   Arch their tanned, hairy backs
      Toward the fiery sun.

As hard-headed men
   Scurry like ants
      To build their new home.

And the sun bakes . . .

And the sun bakes and bounces
   Like ocean waves
      Against the hot steel.

And the men melt . . .

Mounds of men
   Arch their tanned, hairy backs
      Toward the fiery sun.

As hard-handed steel
   Spreads like branches
      To build their new home.

And the sun bakes . . .
THE FISHERMAN'S WIFE

She rises before him each morning
And starts the fire for the coffee,
Then wakes him,
Several times,
And pretends each time is the first.

And when his cup is empty,
He kisses her forehead and bids farewell.
And she ties back her hair,
And works in the heat of the day,
Humming a very old song to herself.

And when he returns in the afternoon
With a small catch,
She prepares it with a good deal of fuss,
And goes on about how little it takes to feed two.
And he is satisfied.

Then in the evening, he closes his eyes,
And sleepily he asks her to tell it again.
She rubs his white eyebrows
And tells a very old story,
As if it were very new.

About a day so long ago,
That it might have been a dream.
When all the fishermen came and the villagers, too,
To see the great fish,
And the great fisherman.
And how all other fish have since been measured
By the great one,
And all other fishermen measured
By the great one,
And even time itself measured from the day of the great catch.

And she remembers for him, how his back was broad
And his muscles rigid,
And how she stood in the crowd that day,
A slip of a girl,
Who climbed upon her father's shoulders to admire the great one.

And how all the village children
Are brought up on the legend of the great one,
And all the village fishermen,
Even with the modern gear, had never made such a catch,
And . . .

And there was no need to tell more . . .
So she quietly slipped away and put out the light.
And she untied her hair,
And he slept in the cool of the day,
And she hummed a very old song to herself.
EMPTY BARNs

I dreamed last night of morning on the farm,
When rooster crow would wake me to the day,
And misty sunlight filtered through the barn
And settled on the bales of new mown hay.

And I hitched up the team and brought it 'round,
And jingled out into the dampened field,
But then my dream was struck by some strange sound,
And torn away, I left the land untilled.

A cold metallic ringing filled my brain.
I fumbled in the darkness for the time,
And rose and waited by the window pane,
And watched the highest bidder take what's mine.

And piece by piece the dream is sold away,
An empty barn is auctioned off today.
SESTINA OF CHRISTMAS

A special peace and warmth comes from a holiday
That can take the chill even from Christmas,
Though December fights it well
With icy wind and snow.
Still, peace can melt the strongest
Foe, when given time.

But far away, in another time,
The reason for the happy holiday
In December, the Prince of the strongest
Peace of all was born, and created Christmas,
And warmed hearts like the sun melting snow,
And defeated Death as well.

And so it would serve us well
To remember, particularly at this time
Of holly and ribbons and velvety snow,
Just why it is that this holiday
Is so special—this rejoicing we call Christmas—
The birth of the best and the purest and the strongest.

For often, our ambitions may be the strongest
Pursuit in our lives, to live well
And push and prosper; and Christmas
May be reduced to a time
Of merriment and confusion. Then the holiday
Arrives, and we are cold as the men made of snow.

But, we needn't be. Men made of snow
Lead very dull lives. The strongest
May vanish in one sunny day, and a holiday
Should not be abandoned by them. Well,
Let us try then, to find the time
To find in us, the Christ of Christmas.

For if we are to discover the truth of Christmas,
We must learn to rise above the glitter and fancy that snow
Us under, till we haven't the time
For honest meditation. The strongest
Man is the one who lives well
And lives well within his heart, his heart within the holiday.

So rejoice in Christmas and sing your song the strongest,
And fresh as snow your heart should be and your spirit made well,
For holy is the time of the Christmas holiday.
TO THE MOTHER BIRD IN MY YARD

Don't look at me that way!
It is my tree.
Well, OK, it's not my tree
But it is in my yard.

I just want to look at them.
There's nothing quite so fragile in my world,
Little fuzzy, formless bodies
Bleating like xylophone bells.

You must have thought me ridiculous,
When after an hour's hunting
I managed to dig up a poor excuse for an earthworm,
And carried it proudly,
Dangling by the tail,
Or was it the head?
And laid it beneath the tree.

But, you see, I am not like you . . .
You can soar.
You can rise high above this world
And look down on me,
And you should,
For I, live in nests that others build;
And I can't leave when the weather turns bad.
GHOSTS

It's a black storm,
And the lights keep changing their minds,
And I haven't a candle around
To keep me company.

If I were younger,
I'd sit with my sisters and tell ghost stories,
And scare myself silly,
And have to sleep with my head under the covers.

But now I understand . . .
That ghosts are just spirits
That once were alive,
Like my love for you.

I even know a haunted house.
It was built inside my mind,
But the ghost there can find you
Even under the covers.

I must keep searching for the candle.
YOU'VE HAD THEM

It's one of "those" days.

One of those days when you actually believe
You're the only one in the world
That really "feels" anything . . . and everything.

One of those days when a careless word
Of even a stranger,
Strikes hard,
Cuts deep,
And eats at you . . . all day long.

One of those days when you get truly angry
With a smile,
And a laugh is unbearable,
When past friends
And loves
Haunt your mind . . . and your heart.

And finally,
One of "those" nights,
When you memorize the ceiling,
And think of things
That could have been . . . that should have been.
NIGHT

As houselights are yet dimming
At the closing of the day,
A black and velvet curtain falls
As setting for the play.

A symphony of music
Then arises from the ground,
As every tiny creature
Tunes its tiny feature sound.

And softly sing the breezes
Through every leaf and branch,
As one by one the twinkle troupe
Begin their fairy dance.

But then . . . the star of stars appears
To brighten up the show,
And casts a spell of slumber
On the audience below.

And though we mortal players
May lie hypnotized till dawn,
For those appearing nightly,
The show must go on . . . and on . . . and on.
IF YOU ARE REALLY THERE

If you are really there, he prayed,
As others do insist,
Then send to me a signal
That proves you do exist.

If you can really hear me
And know my every need,
Then help me to believe it,
By granting some small deed.

Just something rather simple
To help convince my mind,
For I should like to serve you
If I only had a sign.

And he waited for a vision
To appear before his eyes,
And he waited for a lightning bolt
To streak across the sky.

And he waited, and he listened,
And he watched carefully,
But nothing seemed unusual,
Nothing, he could see.

And then he felt embarrassed,
And rose and walked away,
And he walked upon some flowers
That were opening for the day.
And the clouds above him parted,
And the sun came pouring down,
And a robin fluttering by him
Started pecking at the ground.

And a fragrant breeze caressed him
With a gentleness divine,
But he walked on, disappointed,
For there had been no sign.

He walked on, disappointed,
For there had been no sign.
THE FORGOTTEN LITTLE BROTHER

I watched her from the window,
And saw her sitting with a boy she had beaten the tar out of
Only a year ago.
And then I saw him catch a cricket
And push it at her,
And she screamed and played like she was afraid.
And that's when I knew . . .

That's when I knew things would never be the same.
Shoot, I've seen her pull the legs off crickets
And never flinch.
But now, some pimple face with glasses is a big hero
'Cause he's brave enough to hold one.
And now Mom calls her Samantha,
And Sam even seems to like it,
And strolls around with shiny lipstick
Smeared in her braces,
Wearing dresses
That she can't climb trees in,

. . . I'll never trust another woman.
VACATION BLUES

The sun is bright, the air is fresh,
The weather here is at its best,
But I don't fit in with the rest,
I should be home.

The sand is smooth, the ocean clear,
It's nice to have the family near,
But I still feel a stranger here,
I should be home.

I'm seeing things I've never seen,
I'm smothered with good company,
But no one here can comfort me,
I should be home.

I need you to watch over me,
My home is not a house, you see,
No wooden arms could shelter me,
You are my home.
A MOTHER'S THOUGHTS

How gracefully she sleeps,
    And with such confidence,
All sprawled out,
    Turning like a willow in the wind
Across the tiny bed.

She doesn't get that from her mother . . .
    Who is a sleeping coward,
Still in the fetal position,
    Whose dreams in her sleep
Substitute for dreams in her life.

I hope she can always sleep this way,
    In a pastel world of roly-poly puffy things,
Her small hand clutching a fuzzy Boo-Bear.
    Not for her own sake,
It's the bear that's insecure.

And I begin to wonder,
    As I sit, stupidly, watching her sleep,
If I am even necessary--but wait, listen!
    A tiny whimper, soft as a lullaby,
Triggers an internal, instinctual alarm

And my little weeping willow needs
Me
Again.
THE UNEMPLOYED OF WILSON'S TAVERN

Hello Joe, any work these days?
Fumblers stumble through greasy doors.
Wilson's Tavern, same as always.

IN, he comes like other Wednesdays,
The barkeep smiles and starts to pour.
Hello Joe, any work these days?

He sits, grey-suited, and surveys;
They watch his wealthy eyes explore.
Wilson's Tavern, same as always.

How quickly they would steal his place,
And leave their beers and pinball scores.
Hello Joe, any work these days?

They buy him drinks to make him stay,
But all their pleading he ignores.
Wilson's Tavern, same as always.

Still, their empty glasses raise
When Foreman King walks OUT the door.
Hello Joe, any work these days?
Wilson's Tavern, same as always.
LOCKED

You,
You who say you love me,
Have locked me away
Deep inside you.

I stare out at the world
Through your bars,
And I sometimes feel
That I could break this cold steel
With words,
Carefully chosen words,
That I whisper when I am very angry
And very alone.

You guard me
With suspicion;
I regard you
With contempt.

I need to feel free,
So that I would not have to hate you,
As the slave must hate
Even the best master.

I should leave.
But no, knowing that you love me,
I will stay here,
Imprisoned,
Deep inside you.
TROPICAL DREAMS

I dreamed of Key West.
Life moves slowly there,
Like a run down music box.

Colors swim in the waters,
And you eat them for breakfast.

And I saw myself there,
Dark and lovely,
At the celebration of the sunset.

... But then the bells came.
And I awoke to this world,
Already five minutes behind.

Colors swim in the waters here, too,
But it's not healthy to eat them.

And the people live in towers here
That block out the sunset,
And celebrate themselves.

But not this morning.
This morning I'll ignore the bells.

This morning I'll run ten minutes behind,
And roll over and head south
And try to recapture the sunset.
TRIAL

He's poundin' with that hammer,
And it's poundin' in my brain,
And the window panes are yelpin'
Bout the poundin' of the rain.

But me, I'm sittin' quiet,
Just starin' down these walls,
And Ma just keeps on cryin',
And Pop don't come at all.

Mr. Blue Suit talkin' 'gainst me,
He's all mighty puffed and proud,
Keeps a-struttin' by the jury
And then smilin' at the crowd.

But the man they give to help me,
He's all nervous-like and grim,
Keeps a-jumpin' at the thunder
Like it hollered right at him.

The judge, he seems as if
He's got some better thing to do,
Then to sit and hear me swearin' lies
That's done been proved ain't true.

Cause they all know how I "done" it,
And they love to hear it told,
Kept a-pushin' through the doorway
Till they's all the room could hold.
But they don't know how she "done" me,  
Or they'd see that "fair" ain't "fair,"  
But still they get to judge me,  
When they wasn't even there.

And I feel their eyes a-starin',  
As they watch me fearfully,  
But their eyes ain't near as frightened  
As when she last looked at me.

And her eyes have come to try me  
More than law could ever do,  
So it really doesn't matter  
That these folks condemn me, too.

For there ain't no need in fightin',  
Cause after all there is to tell,  
The judge'll pound that hammer,  
And send me straight to Hell.
HALEY’S CHRISTMAS

My momma’s got a sister
Living outta town away,
And we always go and visit there
Around the holidays.

And Haley, she’s my cousin,
And close to my age, too,
And every year at Christmas
We get special jobs to do.

Like last year me and Haley
Strung the popcorn for her tree,
And when we got it finished
It was pretty as could be!

And I guess my tree was pretty
With its tinsel gold and gay,
But I didn’t get to make it
Or to snack along the way.

But I got a brand new dolly
When ol’ Santa came to call,
But I can’t braid her hair the way
You can with Haley’s dolls.

Her mother made her mittens
That were blue and yellow striped,
But Momma said she’d buy mine,
If I’d keep them clean and white.
And Momma says I'm lucky
To have things so nice and fine,
That none of Haley's presents
Are worth near as much as mine.

And though it sounds ungrateful,
I can't help but believe,
That my favorite gift at Christmas
Is Haley--Christmas Eve.
TORCH SONG

I had a remarkable voice.  
Everyone said so.  
A four octave range, 
You don't hear that these days.

And I could sing those old torch songs  
So stormily,  
And so passionately,  
That even the rough-edged ones  
Who gambled in the back,  
Sat with tears in their eyes,  
And sent back drinks to my dressing room.

"Molly," they'd say, "you're even prettier than you sing:  
Gal, you're goin' places!"  
And they sat and told my fortune  
While they bluffed and folded theirs,  
And I accepted their compliments  
And their drinks, graciously,  
But refused their advances.  
If I was going places,  
I wanted nothing left behind me.

And so I waited.  
And I sang those songs of love and desire,  
Though I had known neither,  
And I waited.  
And the couples who whispered in the smoke-filled clubs  
Changed places  
And faces,  
And I waited.
But there was no great discovery,
And I only went to "other places,"
And there never was an offer,
Not to sing, anyway,
And I waited . . .
Too long.

I once had a remarkable voice.
Everyone said so.
A four octave range,
You don't hear that these days.

Smoke and age have ravaged me now,
And I rasp through the mike
Over the voices of the rough-edged ones
Who gamble in the back.
"Molly, you sing worse than you look!"
And I accept their insults
And their drinks, graciously.
HISTORY

Blocks, blankets, bows,
Dolls, dogs, toys,
Scrapes, skirts, grades,
Dances, dates, boys,

Left, learned, enjoyed,
Married, moved, employed,

... Next?
I AM NOT A CHILD

"I am not a child," she cried,
"No matter what you say."
"Of course you aren't," he softly said,
And watched her walk away.

And she did not return that night
Although he waited long,
And cursed the words that he had said,
And knew he had been wrong.

Then suddenly he saw a time
Within his memory,
Of pink and ruffled underpants
That climbed upon his knee.

That pinched his nose and pulled his beard,
And danced upon his shoes,
And willingly agreed to
Anything that he could choose.

And it suffered him to realize
The change he'd caused in her,
"I am not a child," she cried,
But how he wished she were.
GOING HOME

Sunday, just at sunrise,
I'll be on my way.
We'll say our last goodbyes.

Should come as no surprise,
You knew I couldn't stay,
Sunday, just at sunrise,

Look into the eyes
Of Him, that men betray.
We'll say our last goodbyes.

For all their petty lies,
They cannot make me stay,
Sunday, just at sunrise.

Please help them realize
The debt I had to pay.
We'll say our last goodbyes.

Till the hour you arise,
The dawn of a new day,
Sunday, just at sunrise,
We'll say our last goodbyes.
He wakens to the morning frost,
And kneads his shoes to keep them soft,
His pile of furs is high, but not
As high as snow piled round him.

He shoves his world into a pack,
And lifts it all onto his back,
And strikes a solitary path,
Through icy, even snow.

He knows not what he searches for,
But knows that he must search for more,
But Winter makes the hunting poor,
Till only skill survives.

Since game has left for greener ground,
He finally makes his way around
To where the river bed is found
Beneath the ice and snow.

He takes the knife out of his pack
And works the ice until it cracks,
Then wipes the blade and puts it back,
And drops his line to fish.

And while he waits he dreams of Spring,
Of fresh laid tracks and melting streams,
Of flashing eyes and furry things
That scamper in the brush.
And then he smiles, remembering
A certain episode last Spring,
When working with his trappings,
He caught a glimpse of game.

A wild scent shot through the air,
He grabbed his gun and ran to where
He found the tracks of something there,
And followed in those tracks.

And then they met upon a hill,
The breathless man, intent to kill,
And wobbly fawn, and spotted still,
Stood waiting for the move.

As glassy eyes stared fearfully,
He waved farewell respectfully,
He knew they'd meet eventually,
When odds were better matched.

But now, strange thoughts swim through his head,
Of what he might have learned instead,
Just where his own life might have led
If he had known that chance.

The chance to learn a better way,
To shed the spots of youthful days,
To understand, but not fall prey
To those who hunt for pleasure.

But he has no time for foolish thought,
To wish for things that just are not,
For dinner hasn't yet been caught,
And he is very empty.
TICK, TOCK, RICK, ROCK

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock,
Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.

She sits and rocks the day away
And knits a tale of yesterday.

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.

He smiles and rubs his beard about,
Then adds the things that she leaves out.

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.

And all the news they have in store
Is always news they've heard before,
But they don't mind it just once more.

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.

Then with the dinner dishes done,
They sit and watch the setting sun.

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.

And plan tomorrow's happenings
By what tomorrow's weather brings.

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.
The evening breeze so gently stirs,
He slips his wrinkled hand in hers
And pats the rhythm of the chairs.

Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock,
Tick, Tock, Rick, Rock.
BUTTERFLY

A work of art,
Created by the master artist
For His vast gallery,

Hovers down and up,

And kisses my rock garden,

Examines a freckle on my elbow,

Floats above my head and leaves me

Feeling blessed.
A LETTER HOME

Though I am not with you,
I feel your love surround me.
The warmest arms I've ever felt,
Are still wrapped all around me.

For memory preserves you,
All I do is close my eyes,
And cherish that reflection
Till the emptiness subsides.

I know Time is a friend of ours,
Though Distance is our foe,
But before I end with page and pen,
There's something you should know--

Your needs are in my prayers tonight,
My strongest wish will be,
That I become as much to you
As you've become to me.
VIOLETS

I don't get off the place much,
Exceptin' last July,
When Pa was feelin' poorly
And sent me for supplies.

And when I'd got to Lawson
And tied the horses down,
I stopped in for some supper
At a place this side of town.

I'd finished with my eatin'
And was pushin' up my chair,
When I see'd a gal a-starin'
Like she know'd me from somewhere.

Now she was tall and slender,
And awful pretty, too,
And she strutted right up to me
Like a cock is apt to do.

And she asked me where I come from
And what my business be,
But I couldn't quite remember
When she stood so close to me.

Then she put her arm around me
And whispered me her name,
And her hair smelled just like violets
In the summer, when it rains.
But that was more'n a year ago,
And Papa's better now,
I don't get off the place much,
Too busy, anyhow.

But sometimes in the summer,
When the rain is blowin' wild,
And the world smells just like violets,
Papa wonders why I smile.
EVERY SEVENTEEN YEARS

I hear you in the trees,
Like the roar of a fast train,
A cheap summer concert.
And I remember you.

I remember you
And a little girl,
Who was nine
And skinny and innocent.

My grandparents lived in the country then,
And I would nap at the foot of the bed
With the window raised.
And I heard you.

I'm not so innocent, now.
And certainly not skinny,
And much has changed in seventeen years,
Even my name.

But you seem the same,
Maybe a little smaller.
No, I guess it's just me
Who's a little bigger.

And after being raised in the city,
I've come back to the country,
And so have you,
But for a brief time.
For you'll return to the earth,
And I'll busy myself above you,
But we'll check on each other, again,
In seventeen years.

Please, wake me then . . .
As I lay napping
At the foot of the bed
With the window raised.
They used to strut through here
In their oily blue jeans
'Bout ten o'clock
And cuss and drink
And bet their wives' money.
They'd talk about girls they had hustled
And places they were goin',
Though night after night
They just ended up here.

He sat in the corner and rocked back and forth.
He racked the balls and swept up the place
For a small piece of change
And a room in the back.

I never knew his name.
They called him Eight Ball.
And they laughed at him
And cussed him.
He was slow,
Real slow,
And he had a big face.
He talked plain enough,
But he didn't listen good,
Not good at all.
I'd heard that he was some half-wit relation
To the first owner
And no one ever had the guts to kick him out.

However it happened,
Eight Ball was a regular
And as much a source of entertainment as the pool tables.
They teased him.
They played tricks on him.
And he'd just smile,
Either 'cause he really didn't understand,
Or 'cause he really liked the attention.

He was easy to blame
For he never talked back,
And one night
One of them
Staggered into him,
And spilled beer on him,
And smacked him hard,
Sending him to me for a refill.
I felt bad, and patted his hand as I passed him the suds.
And he looked up at me and said,
"Aw, it's all right, I've got it over on them.
See, I knows I'm goin' no place."
Looked right at me and whispered,
"But they's already there."
I liked him after that.
OUR SOULS TO KEEP

What shall we eat?
Asked the lady of the suite.
What shall we eat
If we're hungry?

We shall fix a treat
Of every kind of meat,
Or any type of sweet
We may wish for.

When will we eat?
Asked the lady in the street.
When will we eat?
We are hungry.

We will have to wait,
And then investigate
For something for our plate
We can live on.

Where shall we sleep?
Asked the lady of the suite.
Where shall we sleep
If we're tired?

With our day complete,
We'll quietly retreat,
And peacefully we'll sleep
In a dream land.
How will we sleep?
Asked the lady in the street.
How will we sleep?
We are tired.

We will fall asleep
As we shiver in the street,
The Lord our souls to keep,
No one else will.