

NON REQUIEM



Mel Konner

Map Poem

A man
can shuffle through everything,
browsing. But, in the face
of every girl, in back of the face,
there is a girl,
and below the boulevards,
passages. Thumb
them. Turn them over.
One has puzzling dark eyes
in her hair. "This young lady . . .
a new kind of fiction."

At last the man asks
"Why don't you
never buy nothing? See
this city? There's a map,
it tells you how to go."

You do not understand,
but you buy. She
doesn't understand. You go out
with your arms full of books
and sit on a streetcorner.

She sits
and no-one notices. Cars
honk. She opens the map,
puzzles it.

You read poems from a book
with a lovely dust cover.
She tells
how they go.

"The Storm Dead"

William K. Jordan, 57, of West Concord, N. H., died of a heart attack while climbing a snow-slicked hill to get help for his school bus, stalled with 25 children aboard.

Boston Globe, 11/15/67

A man puffs up from his motor,
dead, with the useless, helpless sense
you get, hands in his pockets,
incensed, wronged. White smoke
trails down from his mouth, and away,

while dozens of heads unmuffle
in can't-get-to-school gladness,
& after too long a time, a little fear,

white smoke trails, battery
cables on the mind, the legs

losing the ground, fingers
scratching the, clutching the
splitting air, the ground,

the ground,
drowning in snow.

The Savannah Dusk

The savannah dusk, the *African*
savannah dusk embraces us;
our semi-arid dream. How little
roots in it! How near unbroken
the horizon rounds the breaking sky;
The pink-black nightcoming.

The Jeep truck bumps in the spoor,
and bumps us trembling on the truck-top,
all the fencepost shadows spring like buck,
one, one; like buck
spooked by the lights; or like the stars, one,
one, bright seaspray, flecks of the black tide.
The black tide inches on the desert sand,
my waiting beside your watching,
slender brand in the wind, I cannot not think,
Get hold of the truck. Get hold.

My heart recedes:

"Dusk, too. Remember crossing the dike?"
To drive through perfect dusk . . . then stopping
to mount the embankment, breathe, and tangle
our selves between the ocean and the sea.
That was that moment, but the time, the time . . .

The dusk waves break upon us without sound
and will not ebb, but soak, drown all the desert
in the desert night.

See: oceans around us,
waterless, perfect sand; my hand, the back
of your neck, your hair; your cheek, lips; you, saying
"This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

Even This African River

Even this African river
resounds slimly under engine-throbs.

Cicadas', frogs', and dusk birds'
sounds fail
as the motor pitches water up
to white houses
not ten steps from the river bank.

Cicadas', frogs', and dusk birds' sounds.
Birds' sounds.

The pumphouse blocks, blocks out
and marks the glow of dusk.
In a resigned turning,
sloshing among drowned reeds,
I am correctly afraid of things to come.