

Poems by Salvatore Buttaci

WHAT THE MOON KNOWS

wolves howl
from wooded sanctuaries
in the winters of night

if only we could translate
their lupine bayings
at the moon

if only we could learn
what the moon already knows
and hides from us

if we should tremble
behind locked doors
or ride the howling into sleep

HOKKU

Trees conceal their year rings

Kindness interprets all tongues

In sleep no one is harmed

Sunset bleeds across skylines

Life is measured with a thimble

Satan collects dark souls

Time swirls all to dust

In God's palm, safety

DECIDERS OF THE DEAD

Valkyries screech across air-lofts.

Sk^gul leads the wing-pack,
those emissaries of Odin,
Hildir and Gondul too,
flanking her towards the wet blood-earth.

Sword-grippers, brave in their death-fight,
who surrender ghost-selves
exhaled from shell-frames lie waiting
for Valkyries who made
final death-picks—who lives, who dies.

These lone fighters, now shoulder-borne
to ghost-homes in Valhalla,
will mouth-treat with profound hunger
the beast resurrected nightly—
meat gifts, drinks of goat mead.

How pleased the Icelandic air-loft god!
Odin dines with the slain
whose shell-frames defy death
and forever joust in play-war games
Odin and the Valkyries attend.

GHOSTS

I have seen the invisible
float through matter like dust or mist.
These ghosts dancing invincible,
impervious to hand or fist.

I have seen what housed hearts that beat
when once they walked upon the Earth.
Ghosts now free of life's defeats
care nothing of death or birth.

I have seen the invisible
take on the form of human and beast:
these ghosts crashing my tranquil dreams,
the sizzle of static after the storm.

QUICKSAND

i'm much taller than this
because what you see
is my waist at ground level
not my feet encased unseen

beneath this quicksand
this syrupy stir of deathtrap
drawing me down by degrees
until what you'll most likely notice
for a short while anyway
will be my bearded chin
and then a trembling upper lip
quivering nostrils like tunnels
bracing for the onslaught
of storm waters
and finally this balding head
followed by the calmness
of this quicksand pond
a bubble or two perhaps
to signal the crossing
from one world to the next
where I hope a helping hand
Will pull my soul free

REAL LIFE IS AN ILLUSION

Cook-monks in Tibet
meditate in stillness
so they might hear
the whisperings of their souls.

Real life on the Earthly plane
is all illusion, a dream
short-lived, marked
by fleeing time.

Dark world of shadows,
thick sorrows, wounded hearts—
all but twinklings of the eye,
so say, *sotto voce*, the souls.

Eternal life does not begin
when the physical body dies.
It is forever eternal.

Light candles,
the cook-monks say,
so troubled souls will be guided
towards the Light

WE NEED TO LIVE AN HONEST LIFE

When darkness falls upon the world each night,
We weary drudgers, workers done with day,
Repose our tired bones in dreams of flight
Across the plains of sleep, but first we pray
That God will watch the bodies left behind
And come the dawn, the sun will rise again.
No guarantees, however, can we find
For one more day of breath. Our lives can end
In sleep, a heart at once in silence done,
We, lost to life, be stranded in gray dreams.
Not knowing when the dawn will finally come,
We need to live an honest life, not scheme
Our way to wealth by immoral doings.
All hope for Heaven's dawn would fall to ruins.

STAND WITHIN THE EYE

war gods lick the spoon
of human stew
where raw boys
who fight and die
are chunks of meat
to please divine palates

try to see the whole picture
the meaningless gestalt
as if you had the power
to stand within the eye
of Orion or Odin himself
and look down on pathos

welcome to these lines
there is a war on
and it doesn't look as if
the bugle boy will
blow it quits or the flag boy
rest those blood-stained colors

it's a fight to the finish
that never quite ends

a stirring of the spoon
a burning away
of all that should be sacred
an unheard prayer for mercy