

Note: The following poem was written in 1981, anticipating the 1982 environmental Justice civil rights demonstrations in Warren County, North Carolina, beginning September 15, 1982.

It was Christmas Eve. I was alone at the Afton cabin. Deborah finally had a chance to spend a Christmas with family and friends in Ohio.

I knew the county-state demonstrations were inevitable. I just didn't know when. The state, under its own authority, and under the authority of the federal government, would need to go forward with its plan to bury 10,000 truckloads of PCBs in the poor and predominantly black community of Warren County, NC., and I would need to stand by my December, 1978 statement: "Due process first, then civil disobedience" as a last resort if the state of North Carolina were to attempt to bury PCB-contaminated soil in Afton. I knew that even if I had to walk to the site alone and protest it, I would. But as it turned out, the demonstrations proved to be the largest nonviolent civil disobedience in the South at that time since Dr. King marched through Alabama. I was thinking about the inevitable conflict that lay ahead and took a walk down the hill and returning to the cabin looked up and saw it all lit up in white Christmas tree lights glittering in the sky among the stars. The sight reminded me of the Christmas story, the Three Kings, the manger in Bethlehem, and the crucifixion. Hence the poetry and imagery. It was indeed like a manger cradled in the stars.

I returned to the cabin, went in the kitchen, poured a glass of wine, went to the office, sat at the typewriter, and it seemed ideas just started flowing. It was as if I were taking dictation from the Influx of a diviner mind into my own in a stream of literary influences and began to write.

Christmas Eve, 1981: A Journey to Bethlehem

By: Ken Ferruccio

This humble log cabin seems at times no more than a manger,
cradled in the stars, and I, a stranger from afar, come to worship,
seeking renewal through the wine of a divine ritual.

I'm drunk with the wine of an old age, old clothes, Warrenton wool coats, gifts that fit me
well, and worn in memory of one whom I shall never know.

And not with the wine of an old age only,
but as history in casks of wine long mellowed

till some poor unfortunate fellow, with wit for axe breaks open the cask and lets the old wine flow,
so poets in apostolic succession, illuminating present and past, renew the lineage of Christ through the poetic act
and intoxicate my soul.

Poetry is a journey to Bethlehem.

I haven't been able to find a card that says just what I would want it to say, Christmas stubbornly refusing to clone cards of my own musings, so I break open another cask and cut the wine deep
with the crows feet of self-reflection,
undermining self-deception,
bending rhyme to meaning in acts of self-restraint.

I am overwrought with wine this Christmas Eve
and with the eternal sadness Socrates heard long ago on the Aegean
And brought to his mind
The eternal ebb and flow of human misery.

Why should the the long fermenting old wine flow, flow again and so renew the strife, why, especially, on this holy night?

I am overwrought with wine
and come to worship - not in the glory of kings,
But in the shabbiness of ceremony and ritual divine I sing,
frost on my stubbled chin,
hoping to let warm love in,
I am, indeed, fit mockery of the sublime,
but still I sing.

I am overwrought with wine and could go on singing forever,
a mere self-mockery, though clever,
And, no doubt, much to your chagrin —

But the phone is ringing —

I'm invited to a noblesse oblige of Christmas Eve.

Though no hierarchical suspenders hold up my genes,
my presence is required to rekindle an old saint's dream ,

that the aesthetics of fire means no one is cold,
And the Christmas tree that glitters means no one is hungry for the bread of life.

A poet's dream I know, for fire and cold,
Glittering lights, and hunger for the bread of life
Will ever be at strife, As the new world with the old.

In the grandeur that was Rome,
a child was born to nail a Man to a cross
On Adam's grave.

Shall I resolve to live in mundane ways
in Adam's grave beneath the cross,
or as history in casks of wine long mellowed
till some poor unfortunate fellow
with wit for axe breaks open the cask,
and lets the old wine flow,
shall I, in apostolic succession,
shoulder my manger, wine, and dull old axe,
and journey to Bethlehem to be born?