

What Ohio Needs

Ohio needs three active volcanoes.
Ohio needs a seashore.
Part of Ohio should be jungle.
There should be lots
of action in Ohio, but
very few people — surfers,
poets, rock-climbers,
beautiful girls.
Ohio needs many undiscovered
caverns, and at least twenty
peaks over 5000 meters.
There should be no roads
in Ohio.
Ohio needs a fjord.
And at least two
distinct species
of wild horses
should live in Ohio.

The Duke of Chemical Birds

Canto I

Winsome, brindle widows
from the blue tombs of Pennsylvania
watch the Duke of Chemical Birds
fly the telluric clouds,
braving the thermals of Akron.

He wears his Parma socks,
he was born in Toledo
of graven images, and he
lusts in a latex suit.

The Duke of Chemical Birds
has a degree from Bowling

Green, and suffers fools gladly.
His eyes are onions hidden
in the shade, his mind
is a tree snapped by wind
in nineteen twenty three.

He dove in Lucky Quarry last
April only to see the buzzards
arrive in Hinkley on the bottom.
Two miles south of Clyde,
he knows the plug, which pulled,
will sink Ohio.

He is flying there, but stopped
by a scene in mezzotint: Gentlemen
taking the cure in Ashtabula;
Cleveland, from a dirigible,
burning.

The Duke of Chemical Birds
pulls at the plug.

Ohio now awaits the pox.
The land is wet and low and plowed.
The gentry wear their best silk suits,
women cross their words with knees.
The Duke of Chemical Birds
slides through the air, erect.
"The pox," he says in a dreadful
voice, "is seemly, but plum and pea
refuse to bear. I go
for aid, most circumspect."

Five hundred psychiatrists, fitted
with scarlet turtlenecks, march
into Ohio. Gulls stir the waters
of Erie, and the Shah of Iran
dreams of old coins, of the Lollypop
Kids, of the Duke of Chemical Birds
spinning like a camshaft in the soy-
bean fields.

The Psychiatrists make a pilot study:
"Ohio is nature's own aversion
therapy. We want out." But Ford

and Rockefeller have made a grant,
and they must stay till they plot and
graph the Duke of Chemical Birds
in melancholy, or catch a native
in an act of thought.

"Nulla die sine linea," they croak,
their notes grown dank and heavy
from Ohio's soil. The lake
laps at Columbus. The plug is
lost. The pox alone will never
save Ohio. The Duke of Chemical Birds
is now Ambassador, fitted in chartreuse
pink, and winging to the Vatican.

Ohio sinks.

Canto II

The Duke of Chemical Birds un-
zipped his blue feathers and streaked
through the President's Garden
at precisely six P.M.

The Dean intoned a Kurdish proverb,
tugged at his hem, and covered
his gibbous face with a black,
transparent veil.

Comparative anatomy was not
his forte.

After sunset in Ohio, men
cannot tell men from men.
And women have never been
known to care.

Ohio is an anamorphosis
of certain dreams — a two-
headed cuckold, spondaic sex, as
at a Maumee Bridge
there's one latrine that serves
and simply's marked
"Between."

Some days there is an
anapestic gist to screams

that echo from the place,
but they are tourists',
unaccustomed to sequestration
by necessity, rather than
by sex or race.

The Duke of Chemical Birds undoes
all this when he moults his clothes,
for he mounts a revolution.

"The Academic Party," his memorandum
states, "is like a pound of feathers
on the moon. It falls as fast
as lead, and makes no greater
boom. Naked, Ohio can
conquer all. Take off your
boots, and next your skin."
"Burn your degrees,
lest you burn by them."

"A bale of doctorates will roast
an ox —gored, or in a pit,
off or near— what I tell
you is precisely what you hear."

The faculty subscribes at \$11.98
the pair. The Duke grows rich,
(he sells the skin at Texas Fairs),
and Ohio is alert for change:
For progress down an alley
in the dark, for spoons to rap
like castanets, for dogs to mew,
and cats to bark.

Canto III

The Duke of Chemical Birds
is inconclusive.
He reads French critics who
have an obsessive desire
to have nothing to say.

The Duke of Chemical Birds
advocates the pre-confusion
of ideas, and knows the

comprehensive development
of absence is Ohio.

Ideas are, like Beothuks,
extinct. One chooses
right without understanding
choice. Art is the apotheosis
of solitude.

With that, the Duke begins to
scream: "Reduce, reduce, Every-
thing we want is vacuum and
void, and will be found in
Cincinnati."

In a broken cup at the river's
edge, the scum afloat like Mu,
the larval stages of an epidemic
poem remind the Duke
of the lonely day he swam
the Cuyahoga. It was not clean.

Matted, sticky, and bilious
green, his feathers mirrored
every catastrophe he'd seen.

The dictionary is inoperative
in Cleveland. Twelve fathoms
down they're holding sales
of dunnage, copra, peat, and
Arizona real estate.

The bids are made in pfennings,
farthings, tubs of gin, sere
husks of willow bark. Each
trades to save the next one
from himself. No Ark appears
on Erie. Cold water's all
that's taken in.

The Duke of Chemical Birds
observes with satisfaction—
a prophet whose land has
drowned at his own instigation

will have credence
everywhere.

No more the blush of exile,
nor apologies for storms
that never came.

The Duke of Chemical Birds
has pulled the plug.
Ohio's sunk.
His fame is like a diamond
in the sun.

EXPLANATORY NOTES:

Parma socks are thin white socks worn with black shoes, a custom in Parma, Ohio, where the ruder mechanics often roll the socks down below the ankle bone.

Beothuks: a peaceful tribe, now extinct, which once inhabited Newfoundland, and encountered Norsemen in the Eleventh Century. No Beothuk was ever known to reside in Ohio.