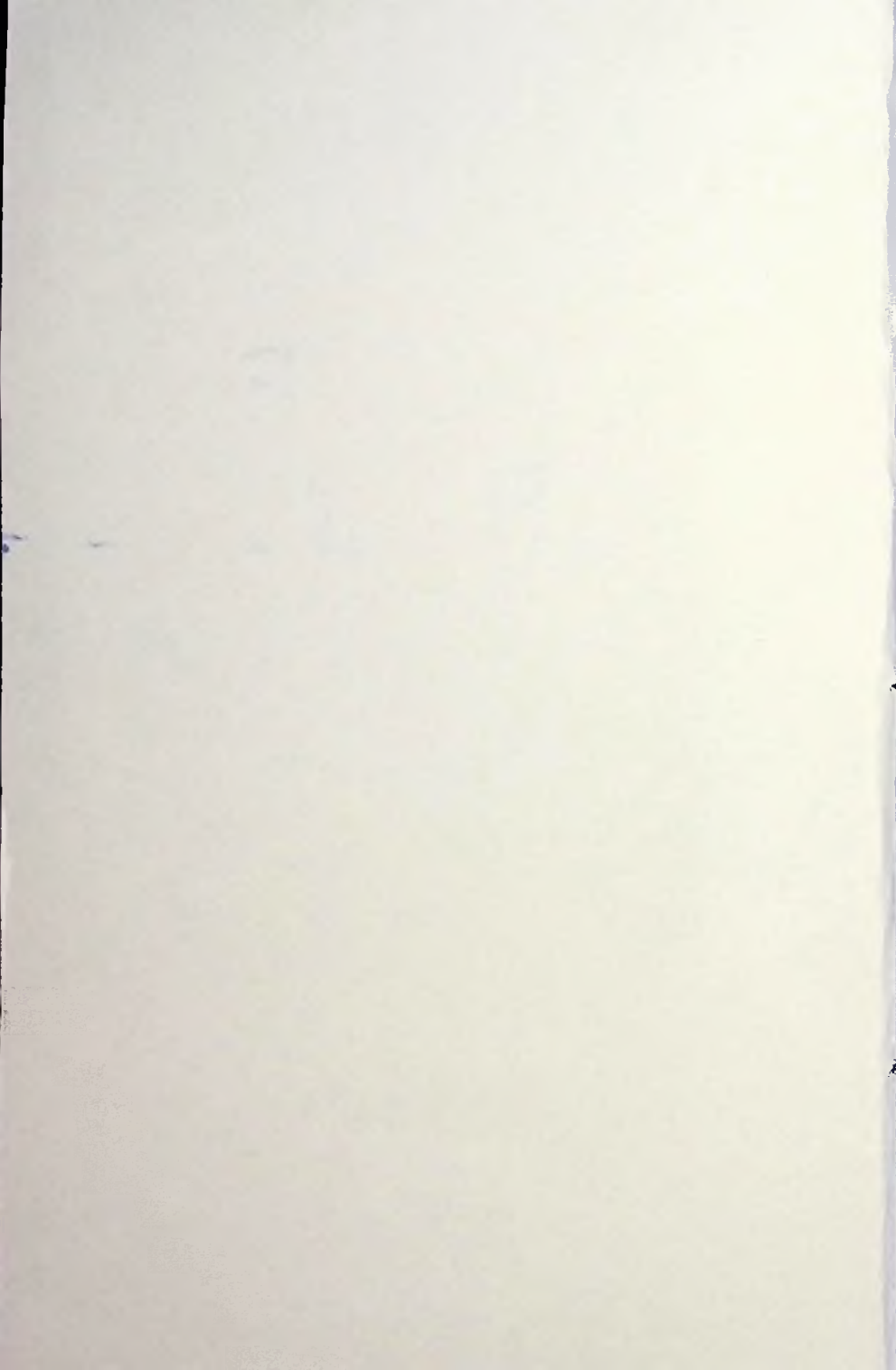


# UNCLE GHOST

Ronald Baatz







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Ronald Baatz

FOR  
JIM

RONALD

Wolfscat Press

RONALD BAATZ is the author of many books of poetry, including: Afternoon Plums Rising, Bird Effort, In a Clay Pig's Eye, On the Back Porch, The Elephants and Everybody Else, White Tulips, Snow Tea, Devouring Birds and The Delicate Work of Song

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For  
Samuel Charters





Morning-  
I shake  
a little birth  
a little death  
on my eggs

Over the years  
each of her babies  
carried to the cemetery in a basket-  
harsh riddles  
hissing cats

If you leave  
I will change nothing  
not even the coldness  
you leave behind  
in the bed

The drunkenness of  
ridiculous sunflowers  
wild pear trees unbroken  
mud scarcely celebrated  
in song

I row  
an unwanted dog to  
the other side of the lake  
along with a box  
of powdered milk

Most suitable now  
my old soul as though  
cooked in salt and water-  
after flower painting  
I am a dog that  
licks the moon

In the kitchen window  
the buds of apple blossoms  
doggedly optimistic-  
sparrows angelic as  
little bags of confetti

In a children's story  
anything can happen-  
I can behave like a tree  
or like a tree and a bird  
at the same time

So eventually I begin to  
like the overbearing climate-  
the sweaty women walking  
ever so slowly through  
their monotonous days

The ugly one  
the one she calls Socrates  
which comes to our garden  
every day at dawn-  
that sparrow

My thoughts of death-  
every day I feed them to the crows  
and every night the crows  
shit them out  
in their sleep

Waking  
in the middle of the night  
I hear a train-  
its whistle going in one ear  
and out the other

Life's a little less painful  
sitting under the trees listening to birdsong  
that has always understood the pain in humans  
and what that pain  
causes humans to do

Sentences spreading  
into other sentences-  
old poet  
butter on  
his belt

Her heart's  
many passages  
of great distance-  
all active as fire  
cool as wet herbs

Finally  
a warm blue afternoon-  
we are human again  
we enjoy being flesh  
swimming like fish

Getting old  
getting close to death  
to being forever forgotten  
to being the ashes of small poems-  
I tie string around a pile of newspapers

It's true-  
I always save  
some piss for the shower  
always forget to rinse  
some soap from the beard

Night feeling its belly  
moving against the earth-  
her beautiful eyes  
spilling over in  
dark reverie

Before this train takes us  
either to heaven or hell  
there will be a brief stop  
in Rome  
for water

In the bath house  
the other old men  
call me "Not a Ghost of a Chance"  
in the park the children call me  
"Uncle Ghost"

I have come to love  
the drunken students  
in the streets at night-  
soon it will be their world  
and they deserve to be drunk

Silently through green fog  
my concealed flying  
all the way to the falls  
where I lose my wings  
but not my sweet songs

There's the sun  
that old fun-loving sun  
with teeth like a prison fence-  
let's keep  
moving

Old woman sitting  
on the same bench  
tells me that if she has  
two hairs left under her arms  
it's a lot

My prayers  
manage only to  
multiply the fleas-  
a particularly clever one  
wags the dog's tail

In my younger days  
an old person's eyes seemed  
to be the eyes of a donkey  
now such eyes are the eyes  
of a saint with bent legs

I am not a rotting pear  
so the fruit flies  
spend no time with me-  
we cannot have our picture  
taken together

Boat not mine  
I lift the oars  
watch them drip-  
tomorrow I will demand  
my shoes back

Cold night in bed-  
my wife breathing on me  
as though trying to keep  
an infant warm  
or just alive

Branches bare  
except for dark shriveled crab apples  
their spirits probably somewhere  
in Hong Kong  
by now

While picking lettuce  
she says she suspects  
that her pussy becomes aware  
of its own tremulousness  
before she does

Smell of burning insects  
itching my nose  
but rain draws near  
and it will plant itself  
like a tree

It has  
gotten to the point  
where my ego looks at me  
as though I were an ancient fig tree  
that has lost its tongue

Fog narrowly escaping with its life  
angels growing fat from eating  
too many cloud sandwiches  
our conversation unfinished  
at the cemetery gate

The peace of exile  
the wine easing loneliness  
the moon's follies unambiguous-  
but I cannot break my old  
crazy lazy writing habits

Piercing the moon  
that's defenseless as a soft melon-  
the innumerable  
venomous arrows  
of love's mistakes

I know  
all the sighs of high praise  
the tomato has for the sun-  
I eat them and the tomato  
on rye with mayo

Scattering  
my first wife's ashes  
in a high and windy place-  
so high and so windy  
my hat's blown off

Sunset flagrantly prostituting itself-  
and there's that dog that  
used to drink holy water  
in the church before it  
burned to the ground



The oranges in the kitchen  
have grown more robust overnight-  
is my life the tree  
these oranges  
now grow on?

If you have been loved poorly  
go sit under the trees  
by the spraying river  
go sit with the wet ants  
their numberless stories of woe

Forbidden blessings-  
I have them and I should  
make something out of them  
before they start making something  
out of themselves

Relax-  
no harm will come  
to the merriment of the berry  
spinning in its  
own decay

Alone  
I take the night  
and slowly soften it on my tongue  
so it's easy  
to swallow

Spreading in the sky  
an openness of deliberate blue-  
in a house by the sea  
a piano lesson  
cut short

The stars go unbathed  
the planets go untempted  
the clouds go unschooled  
the roses go unquestioned  
the flies go buzz

A flush of happiness  
I breathe in like a dragon  
who wants to tell me what's what  
I open my heart like Jesus  
it's a tomato can

Old age-  
fading eyesight  
can't tell the difference  
between a dead leaf  
and dog shit

Night-  
while watching  
a distant airplane  
blinking in the trees  
I inhale the drunken universe

In spring mud  
the fat moon's footprints-  
I open my fly  
take out the  
old bald monk

Death  
disguised as a mosquito  
on a large wet melon-  
I pray for the living  
ask favors of the dead

While I'm writing  
new instructions for the stars  
with a burning stick in the night air  
a moth crosses the  
closed bridge

Like the perfect cricket  
I continue singing my lazy song  
knowing I've already  
practically killed  
a lifetime

Suffering plea  
of the red flea-  
o death do not do  
the old dog  
just yet

My dark thoughts  
get a glimpse of the moon  
the moon gets a glimpse  
of my dark thoughts-  
together they play

Dawn-  
throwing seeds from a basket  
and already it's been a bad day of  
too many bones cracking  
in my skull

Until they bathe  
in the soft dirt at the  
edge of the garden  
sparrows avoid  
being seen

Late autumn-  
all morning  
I do nothing  
but kick a wrinkled ball around  
in the yard

Hour after hour  
fearless spirits leaving  
the earth behind-  
I give the cat a bowl  
of cold milk

When you are young  
the passing of time is a celebration  
when old you become all too aware  
of time's infinite number of tiny wings  
like those found on termites

What will the light be like  
will there even be a light  
I have lived in a tunnel  
I have lived with dead fish  
I have closed their mouths

As she lies naked  
up against my naked back  
I let slip a weak-kneed  
lonely fart  
in her bush

Dead moth turning into rouge  
buried in the closet in  
my black overcoat  
that old priest of  
undying despair

In the early spring garden  
the sun commissioning works  
based on the memory of its birthplace-  
all I want is to make one woman's heart  
happy

I touch my poems  
their desolate surfaces  
the craters made by fingertips-  
I don't want them  
visited by language

Sorrow begins  
like a buzzing in a church bell-  
the imperfections of solitude  
can be kept secret  
for only so long

World of nuts and flux  
of beatings and blood  
of tranquility and ripe melons  
of five black wooden elephants  
purchased in a junk shop in Paris

In the cold light morning  
a woman lounging in  
a swimming hole  
nothing but blue veins  
for eyelids

Impossible prayers  
opening slowly  
like fat peonies-  
I lose my only hat  
on a dark hill

There is no crow  
that would want to know  
that the ants in my pants  
feel at home  
in the dark

House of ruins  
or museum of flowering shutters  
and those small sinful feet of hers  
how they ignore  
all the sun's efforts

My black overcoat will live  
in dangerous times beyond me-  
if it smells like a doghouse  
in warm fog  
it's my fault

O the poor earth boiling over  
with red bugs big as  
ketchup bottles  
shiny in a diner  
open round the clock

Painstakingly  
I lick every seed  
I throw to the birds-  
so at least some part of me  
will fly away

The angel of death-  
it has been known to come down  
even in chimneys  
but not with bags  
of toys

Tall black pines  
holding the moon up high  
as though it were a skull  
thankfully empty of  
human thought

My soul  
not quite as quick as a fly  
but nonetheless flying around  
in the same  
dumb circles

I notice that the older I get  
the stronger the compulsion gets  
to keep my body clean  
as though dying spotless  
will make my ashes lighter

While cutting away  
the rotten parts of a pear  
I wonder how many gods  
can fit on the head  
of a fruit fly



And once everyone is in hell  
the planting of gardens will commence  
great beautiful gardens  
the devil himself will want to  
help water

Earth like a blind dog  
following the sun  
but the dragonfly  
sees everywhere  
at once

Row row row your boat  
gently down the drunken stream-  
merrily merrily  
life is but a  
silent scream

Fearlessly  
the gracious swan  
giving its condolences  
to the tiger weeping at  
the lake's edge

Different town  
same river  
different birds  
same songs  
different poems  
same old shit

In this world  
of chicken bones found on sidewalks  
numerous names for babies  
can be found  
in libraries

Long pigtailed  
a woman carrying bread  
my desire grinning  
with the irrepressible redness  
of fleas

I was just a small kid  
when I learned how to use a swing  
but I was able to swing high enough  
to see beyond the hedges  
to the cemetery

Worrying about the same woman  
and day after day the house  
grows older and darker  
the wind has long black hair  
at night snow comes

Mercilessly  
the big hands of the river  
bringing rain from another country-  
I haven't played badminton  
in years

The dead understand the living  
better than the living do  
and when the dead cry  
for the living  
rivers flood

If just one more dog  
in this neighborhood  
is named Moses  
I'm moving to  
the desert

My earthly singing  
offers up some playful mischief to the heavens  
but the best of my songs remain unknown  
like sparks turning into darkness  
just above the fire

End of summer  
its brilliance gone-  
while eating a pear  
my wife mentions  
the rest of my life

The togetherness  
of birds in flight  
washing up against the moon  
which is as quiet  
as a stringless lute

Insomnia-  
doubtless it will be  
with me until the end  
I'll probably die one night  
while trying to fall asleep

Children  
wave to me as I walk by  
they mistake me for the man I used to be-  
thank god the road I leave town on  
is the soft dirt I had prayed for

In one bush  
just before nightfall  
the raucous sounds of small birds  
squeezing in one more little orgy  
of sheer happiness

I want to come back as a crow  
and keep coming back as a crow  
until the sun turns into a raisin  
in a dark box  
of other raisins

All night long  
the mockingbird reminds me  
that one must also rely  
on the songs  
of others



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