

## SCATTERING FLOWERS

a poem by George Hitchcock

"It is our best and prayerful judgment that they (air attacks on North Vietnam) are a necessary part of the surest road to peace." LYNDON B. JOHNSON

There is a dark tolling in the air,  
an unbearable needle in the vein,  
the horizon flaked with feathers of rust.  
From the caves of drugged flowers  
fireflies rise through the night:  
they bear the sweet gospel of napalm.

Democracies of flame are declared  
in the villages, the rice-fields  
seethe with blistered reeds.  
Children stand somnolent in their crutches.  
Freedom, a dancing-girl,  
Lifts her petticoats of gasoline,  
and on the hot sands of a deserted beach  
a wild horse struggles, choking  
in the noose of diplomacy.

Now in their cane chairs the old men  
who listen for the bitter wind  
of bullets, spread on their thighs  
maps, portfolios, legends of hair,  
and photographs of dark Asian youths  
who are already dissolving into broken water.

From A Poetry Reading Against the Vietnam War