

**Richard Owens**

SIX BALLADS

MULESKINNER BLUES

those of strange days  
& days waxen weak

—helle hangs down  
a dollar a dime a day

these things  
are spoken of thee

like White Mule whisky  
the whole head suffused

*(we read: not the flames  
but the ruin left  
by the conflagration*

carried by the wind  
on the hard rock pile

mauled by the fire  
—a branding iron

to pop their initials  
on any ass & let it burn

## NAKED IN THE DITCHES

phlegmatic on my bier  
no regrets—my body bears  
truth stem to stern  
beginning with the hips

who am of common stock  
looking to the sea  
face ground—nothing now  
conjured from dust

suffering—hung by the heels  
sought occasion  
as will was never conquered  
to see the host broken

a swinging scythe—the dance  
this most pleasant to me  
so make moan for the old days  
say why should love live

## BORN TO RUN

round these velvet rims  
on the street in a mist  
pinch yourself—mask

or look at the banging man  
banging back home  
stitched in wasting flesh

where sun spends winter  
(the way they fix his tie  
full flowering—little doll

citizen—I feel myself  
(this time spent without you  
slipping down the road

sweet city woman—hold  
like a country morning  
unfamiliar as country rain

something sacred—a tune  
them that got shall get  
who got no bag or baggage

daylight discreetly muted  
—how I'd like to fix his tie  
all the hounds I do believe

please—hear me now  
the show is over—we're alone  
running back to you again

## OLD COUNTRY STOMP

not my crime—not mine alone  
heaven knows it of all things  
could express these carried accents

my faithful friend and servant  
we set ourselves to serve  
welcome the rod—our reason

poorly bread habit come patch  
next day the same—bug  
of wood in what road ways gained

linsey-woolsey—en it jist lovely  
calmer thoughts to iron war  
to attend the axe grace thy end

scattered strength makes the hearth  
bedfellows consigned to sleep  
how they sass me in the holy gloom

## HONKY TONK ANGEL

ways & means—doing alright  
sad women on low ground

my country girl moves me  
screaming in the hallways

poppy blooms—skrotum  
don't say much for syntax

some sort of capital rapport  
variety of discombobulation

she's growing cold—a head  
to pound on—a shiny egg

come with me—we'll go away  
imagine a new locomotion

## COCAINE BLUES

down just about midnight  
all the angels  
rapt—what—to fetch out

thrilled in skinned brass  
calling him home  
built on edge—still at ease

up with his old sweetheart  
& I ran laughing  
home before the landlord

she knew—how to move  
ain't never seen her  
hustle that same run twice