

The book cover features a dense, colorful marbled pattern in shades of teal, orange, blue, and cream. A light blue rectangular box is centered on the cover, containing the title text.

JOHN ASHBERY  
SELECTED  
POEMS

*SELECTED  
POEMS*

ALSO BY JOHN ASHBERY

Poetry

*SOME TREES*

*THE TENNIS COURT OATH*

*RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS*

*THE DOUBLE DREAM OF SPRING*

*THREE POEMS*

*THE VERMONT NOTEBOOK*

*SELF-PORTRAIT IN A CONVEX MIRROR*

*HOUSEBOAT DAYS*

*AS WE KNOW*

*SHADOW TRAIN*

*A WAVE*

Fiction

*A NEST OF NINNIES*

*(with James Schuyler)*

Plays

*THREE PLAYS*

*SELECTED  
POEMS*



JOHN  
ASHBERY

*ELISABETH SIFTON BOOKS*

*VIKING*

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From  
*SOME*  
*TREES*



## TWO SCENES

### I

We see us as we truly behave:  
From every corner comes a distinctive offering.  
The train comes bearing joy;  
The sparks it strikes illuminate the table.  
Destiny guides the water-pilot, and it is destiny.  
For long we hadn't heard so much news, such noise.  
The day was warm and pleasant.  
"We see you in your hair,  
Air resting around the tips of mountains."

### II

A fine rain anoints the canal machinery.  
This is perhaps a day of general honesty  
Without example in the world's history  
Though the fumes are not of a singular authority  
And indeed are dry as poverty.  
Terrific units are on an old man  
In the blue shadow of some paint cans  
As laughing cadets say, "In the evening  
Everything has a schedule, if you can find out what it is."

## POPULAR SONGS

He continued to consult her for her beauty  
(The host gone to a longing grave).  
The story then resumed in day coaches  
Both bravely eyed the finer dust on the blue. That summer  
("The worst ever") she stayed in the car with the cur.  
That was something between her legs.  
Alton had been getting letters from his mother  
About the payments—half the flood  
Over and what about the net rest of the year?  
Who cares? Anyway (you know how thirsty they were)  
The extra worry began it—on the  
Blue blue mountain—she never set foot  
And then and there. Meanwhile the host  
Mourned her quiet tenure. They all stayed chatting.  
No one did much about eating.  
The tears came and stopped, came and stopped, until  
Becoming the guano-lightened summer night landscape,  
All one glow, one mild laugh lasting ages.  
Some precision, he fumed into his soup.

You laugh. There is no peace in the fountain.  
The footmen smile and shift. The mountain  
Rises nightly to disappointed stands  
Dining in "The Gardens of the Moon."  
There is no way to prevent this  
Or the expectation of disappointment.  
All are aware, some carry a secret  
Better, of hands emulating deeds  
Of days untrustworthy. But these may decide.  
The face extended its sorrowing light  
Far out over them. And now silent as a group  
The actors prepare their first decline.

## THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL

As I sit looking out of a window of the building  
I wish I did not have to write the instruction manual on the uses  
of a new metal.  
I look down into the street and see people, each walking with an  
inner peace,  
And envy them—they are so far away from me!  
Not one of them has to worry about getting out this manual on  
schedule.  
And, as my way is, I begin to dream, resting my elbows on the desk  
and leaning out of the window a little,  
Oh dim Guadalajara! City of rose-colored flowers!  
City I wanted most to see, and most did not see, in Mexico!  
But I fancy I see, under the press of having to write the instruction  
manual,  
Your public square, city, with its elaborate little bandstand!  
The band is playing *Scheherazade* by Rimsky-Korsakov.  
Around stand the flower girls, handing out rose- and lemon-colored  
flowers,  
Each attractive in her rose-and-blue striped dress (Oh! such shades of  
rose and blue).  
And nearby is the little white booth where women in green serve you  
green and yellow fruit.  
The couples are parading; everyone is in a holiday mood.  
First, leading the parade, is a dapper fellow  
Dressed in deep blue. On his head sits a white hat  
And he wears a mustache, which has been trimmed for the occasion.  
His dear one, his wife, is young and pretty; her shawl is rose, pink, and  
white.  
Her slippers are patent leather, in the American fashion,  
And she carries a fan, for she is modest, and does not want the crowd  
to see her face too often.  
But everybody is so busy with his wife or loved one

I doubt they would notice the mustachioed man's wife.  
Here come the boys! They are skipping and throwing little things on  
the sidewalk  
Which is made of gray tile. One of them, a little older, has a toothpick  
in his teeth.  
He is silenter than the rest, and affects not to notice the pretty young  
girls in white.  
But his friends notice them, and shout their jeers at the laughing girls.  
Yet soon all this will cease, with the deepening of their years,  
And love bring each to the parade grounds for another reason.  
But I have lost sight of the young fellow with the toothpick.  
Wait—there he is—on the other side of the bandstand,  
Secluded from his friends, in earnest talk with a young girl  
Of fourteen or fifteen. I try to hear what they are saying  
But it seems they are just mumbling something—shy words of  
love, probably.  
She is slightly taller than he, and looks quietly down into his  
sincere eyes.  
She is wearing white. The breeze ruffles her long fine black hair  
against her olive cheek.  
Obviously she is in love. The boy, the young boy with the toothpick,  
he is in love too;  
His eyes show it. Turning from this couple,  
I see there is an intermission in the concert.  
The paraders are resting and sipping drinks through straws  
(The drinks are dispensed from a large glass crock by a lady in  
dark blue),  
And the musicians mingle among them, in their creamy white  
uniforms, and talk  
About the weather, perhaps, or how their kids are doing at school.

Let us take this opportunity to tiptoe into one of the side streets.  
Here you may see one of those white houses with green trim

That are so popular here. Look—I told you!

It is cool and dim inside, but the patio is sunny.

An old woman in gray sits there, fanning herself with a palm leaf fan.

She welcomes us to her patio, and offers us a cooling drink.

My son is in Mexico City," she says. "He would welcome you too

If he were here. But his job is with a bank there.

Look, here is a photograph of him."

And a dark-skinned lad with pearly teeth grins out at us from the worn leather frame.

We thank her for her hospitality, for it is getting late

And we must catch a view of the city, before we leave, from a good high place.

That church tower will do—the faded pink one, there against the fierce blue of the sky. Slowly we enter.

The caretaker, an old man dressed in brown and gray, asks us how long we have been in the city, and how we like it here.

The daughter is scrubbing the steps—she nods to us as we pass into the tower.

Soon we have reached the top, and the whole network of the city extends before us.

There is the rich quarter, with its houses of pink and white, and its crumbling, leafy terraces.

There is the poorer quarter, its homes a deep blue.

There is the market, where men are selling hats and swatting flies

And there is the public library, painted several shades of pale green and beige.

Good! There is the square we just came from, with the promenaders.

There are fewer of them, now that the heat of the day has increased,

But the young boy and girl still lurk in the shadows of the bandstand.

And there is the home of the little old lady—

She is still sitting in the patio, fanning herself.

How limited, but how complete withal, has been our experience of Cuadalupe!

We have seen young love, married love, and the love of an aged mother  
for her son.

We have heard the music, tasted the drinks, and looked at colored  
houses.

What more is there to do, except stay? And that we cannot do.

And as a last breeze freshens the top of the weathered old tower, I turn  
my gaze

Back to the instruction manual which has made me dream of  
Guadalajara.

## *THE GRAPEVINE*

Of who we and all they are  
You all now know. But you know  
After they began to find us out we grew  
Before they died thinking us the causes

Of their acts. Now we'll not know  
The truth of some still at the piano, though  
They often date from us, causing  
These changes we think we are. We don't care

Though, so tall up there  
In young air. But things get darker as we move  
To ask them: Whom must we get to know  
To die, so you live and we know?

## A BOY

I'll do what the raids suggest,  
Dad, and that other livid window,  
But the tide pushes an awful lot of monsters  
And I think it's my true fate.

*It had been raining but  
It had not been raining.*

No one could begin to mop up this particular mess,  
Thunder lay down in the heart.  
"My child, I love any vast electrical disturbance."  
Disturbance! Could the old man, face in the rainweed,

Ask more smuttily? By night it charged over plains,  
Driven from Dallas and Oregon, always *whitber*,  
Why not now? The boy seemed to have fallen  
From shelf to shelf of someone's rage.

That night it rained on the boxcars, explaining  
The thought of the pensive cabbage roses near the boxcars.  
*My boy*. Isn't there something I asked you once?  
What happened? It's also farther to the corner  
Aboard the maple furniture. *He*  
*Couldn't lie*. He'd tell 'em by their syntax.

*But listen now in the flood.*  
They're throwing up behind the lines.  
Dry fields of lightning rise to receive  
The observer, the mincing flag. *An unendurable age.*

## GLAZUNOVIANA

The man with the red hat  
And the polar bear, is he here too?  
The window giving on shade,  
Is that here too?  
And all the little helps,  
My initials in the sky,  
The hay of an arctic summer night?

The bear  
Drops dead in sight of the window.  
Lovely tribes have just moved to the north.  
In the flickering evening the martins grow denser.  
Rivers of wings surround us and vast tribulation.

*THE PICTURE OF LITTLE J. A.  
IN A PROSPECT OF FLOWERS*

He was spoilt from childhood  
by the future, which he mastered  
rather early and apparently  
without great difficulty.

*BORIS PASTERNAK*

I  
Darkness falls like a wet sponge  
And Dick gives Genevieve a swift punch  
In the pajamas. "Aroint thee, witch."  
Her tongue from previous ecstasy  
Releases thoughts like little hats.

"He clap'd me first during the eclipse.  
Afterwards I noted his manner  
Much altered. But he sending  
At that time certain handsome jewels  
I durst not seem to take offence."

In a far recess of summer  
Monks are playing soccer.

II  
So far is goodness a mere memory  
Or naming of recent scenes of badness  
That even these lives, children,  
You may pass through to be blessed,  
So fair does each invent his virtue.

And coming from a white world, music  
Will sparkle at the lips of many who are

Beloved. Then these, as dirty handmaidens  
To some transparent witch, will dream  
Of a white hero's subtle wooing,  
And time shall force a gift on each.

That beggar to whom you gave no cent  
Striped the night with his strange descant.

### III

Yet I cannot escape the picture  
Of my small self in that bank of flowers:  
My head among the blazing phlox  
Seemed a pale and gigantic fungus.  
I had a hard stare, accepting

Everything, taking nothing,  
As though the rolled-up future might stink  
As loud as stood the sick moment  
The shutter clicked. Though I was wrong,  
Still, as the loveliest feelings

Must soon find words, and these, yes,  
Displace them, so I am not wrong  
In calling this comic version of myself  
The true one. For as change is horror,  
Virtue is really stubbornness

And only in the light of lost words  
Can we imagine our rewards.

## SONNET

Each servant stamps the reader with a look.  
After many years he has been brought nothing.  
The servant's frown is the reader's patience.  
The servant goes to bed.  
The patience rambles on  
Musing on the library's lofty holes.

His pain is the servant's alive.  
It pushes to the top stain of the wall  
Its tree-top's head of excitement:  
Baskets, birds, beetles, spools.  
The light walls collapse next day.  
Traffic is the reader's pictured face.  
Dear, be the tree your sleep awaits;  
Worms be your words, you not safe from ours.

## THE YOUNG SON

The screen of supreme good fortune curved his absolute smile into a celestial scream. These things (the most arbitrary that could exist) wakened denials, thoughts of putrid reversals as he traced the green paths to and fro. Here and there a bird sang, a rose silenced her expression of him, and all the gaga flowers wondered. But they puzzled the wanderer with their vague wearinesses. Is the conclusion, he asked, the road forced by concubines from exact meters of strategy? Surely the trees are hinged to no definite purpose or surface. Yet now a wonder would shoot up, all one hue, and virtues would jostle each other to get a view of nothing—the crowded house, two faces glued fast to the mirror, corners and the bustling forest ever preparing, ever menacing its own shape with a shadow of the evil defenses gotten up and in fact already exhausted in some void of darkness, some kingdom he knew the earth could not even bother to avoid if the minutes arranged and divine lettermen with smiling cries were to come in the evening of administration and night which no cure, no bird ever more compulsory, no subject apparently intent on its heart's own demon would forestall even if the truths she told of were now being seriously lit, one by one, in the hushed and fast darkening room.

## ERRORS

Jealousy. Whispered weather reports.  
In the street we found boxes  
Littered with snow, to burn at home.  
What flower tolling on the waters,  
You stupefied me. We waxed,  
Carnivores, late and alight  
In the beaded winter. All was ominous, luminous.  
Beyond the bed's veils the white walls danced  
Some violent compunction. Promises,  
We thought then of your dry portals,  
Bright cornices of cavesdropping palaces,  
You were painfully stitched to hours  
The moon now tears up, scoffing at the unrinsed portions.  
And loves adopted realm. Flees to water,  
The coach dissolving in mists.

A wish

Refines the lines around the mouth  
At these ten-year intervals. It fumed  
Clear air of wars. It desired  
Excess of core in all things. From all things sucked  
A glossy denial. But look, pale day:  
We fly hence. To return if sketched  
In the prophet's silence. Who doubts it is true?

## ILLUSTRATION

I

A novice was sitting on a cornice  
High over the city. Angels

Combined their prayers with those  
Of the police, begging her to come off it,

One lady promised to be her friend.  
"I do not want a friend," she said.

A mother offered her some nylons  
Stripped from her very legs. Others brought

Little offerings of fruit and candy,  
The blind man all his flowers. If any

Could be called successful, these were,  
For that the scene should be a ceremony

Was what she wanted. "I desire  
Monuments," she said. "I want to move

Figuratively, as waves caress  
The thoughtless shore. You people I know

Will offer me every good thing  
I do not want. But please remember

I died accepting them." With that, the wind  
Unpinned her bulky robes, and naked

As a roc's egg, she drifted softly downward  
Out of the angels' tenderness and the minds of men.

## II

Much that is beautiful must be discarded  
So that we may resemble a taller

Impression of ourselves. Moths climb in the flame,  
Alas, that wish only to be the flame:

They do not lessen our stature.  
We twinkle under the weight

Of indiscretions. But how could we tell  
That of the truth we know, she was

The somber vestment? For that night, rockets sighed  
Elegantly over the city, and there was feasting:

There is so much in that moment!  
So many attitudes toward that flame,

We might have soared from earth, watching her glide  
Aloft, in her peplum of bright leaves.

But she, of course, was only an effigy  
Of indifference, a miracle

Not meant for us, as the leaves are not  
Winter's because it is the end.

## *SOME TREES*

These are amazing: each  
Joining a neighbor, as though speech  
Were a still performance.  
Arranging by chance

To meet as far this morning  
From the world as agreeing  
With it, you and I  
Are suddenly what the trees try

To tell us we are:  
That their merely being there  
Means something; that soon  
We may touch, love, explain.

And glad not to have invented  
Such comeliness, we are surrounded:  
A silence already filled with noises,  
A canvas on which emerges

A chorus of smiles, a winter morning.  
Placed in a puzzling light, and moving,  
Our days put on such reticence  
These accents seem their own defense.

## THE PAINTER

Sitting between the sea and the buildings  
He enjoyed painting the sea's portrait.  
But just as children imagine a prayer  
Is merely silence, he expected his subject  
To rush up the sand, and, seizing a brush,  
Plaster its own portrait on the canvas.

So there was never any paint on his canvas  
Until the people who lived in the buildings  
Put him to work: "Try using the brush  
As a means to an end. Select, for a portrait,  
Something less angry and large, and more subject  
To a painter's moods, or, perhaps, to a prayer."

How could he explain to them his prayer  
That nature, not art, might usurp the canvas?  
He chose his wife for a new subject,  
Making her vast, like ruined buildings,  
As if, forgetting itself, the portrait  
Had expressed itself without a brush.

Slightly encouraged, he dipped his brush  
In the sea, murmuring a heartfelt prayer:  
"My soul, when I paint this next portrait  
Let it be you who wrecks the canvas."  
The news spread like wildfire through the buildings:  
He had gone back to the sea for his subject.

Imagine a painter crucified by his subject!  
Too exhausted even to lift his brush,  
He provoked some artists leaning from the buildings  
To malicious mirth: "We haven't a prayer  
Now, of putting ourselves on canvas,  
Or getting the sea to sit for a portrait!"

Others declared it a self-portrait.  
Finally all indications of a subject  
Began to fade, leaving the canvas  
Perfectly white. He put down the brush.  
At once a howl, that was also a prayer,  
Arose from the overcrowded buildings.

They tossed him, the portrait, from the tallest of the buildings;  
And the sea devoured the canvas and the brush  
As though his subject had decided to remain a prayer.

## AND YOU KNOW

The girls, protected by gold wire from the gaze  
Of the onrushing students, live in an atmosphere of vacuum  
In the old schoolhouse covered with nasturtiums.  
At night, comets, shootings stars, twirling planets,  
Suns, bits of illuminated pumice, and spooks hang over the old place;  
The atmosphere is breathless. Some find the summer light  
Nauseous and damp, but there are those  
Who are charmed by it, going out into the morning.  
We must rest here, for this is where the teacher comes.  
On his desk stands a vase of tears.  
A quiet feeling pervades the playroom. His voice clears  
Through the interminable afternoon: "I was a child once  
Under the spangled sun. Now I do what must be done.  
I teach reading and writing and flaming arithmetic. Those  
In my home come to me anxiously at night, asking how it goes.  
My door is always open. I never lie, and the great heat warms me."

His door is always open, the fond schoolmaster!  
We ought to imitate him in our lives,  
For as a man lives, he dies. To pass away  
In the afternoon, on the vast vapid bank  
You think is coming to crown you with hollyhocks and lilacs, or in gold  
at the opera,  
Requires that one shall have lived so much! And not merely  
Asking questions and giving answers, but grandly sitting,  
Like a great rock, through many years.  
It is the erratic path of time we trace  
On the globe, with moist fingertip, and surely, the globe stops;  
We are pointing to England, to Africa, to Nigeria;  
And we shall visit these places, you and I, and other places,  
Including heavenly Naples, queen of the sea, where I shall be king and  
you will be queen,  
And all the places around Naples.  
So the good old teacher is right, to stop with his finger on Naples, gazing

out into the mild December afternoon  
 As his star pupil enters the classroom in that elaborate black and yellow  
 creation.  
 He is thinking of her flounces, and is caught in them as if they were  
 made of iron, they will crush him to death!  
 Goodbye, old teacher, we must travel on, not to a better land, perhaps,  
 But to the England of the sonnets, Paris, Colombia, and Switzerland  
 And all the places with names, that we wish to visit—  
 Caracasbourg, Albania,  
 The coast of Holland, Madrid, Singapore, Naples, Salonika, Liberia,  
 and Turkey.  
 So we leave you behind with her of the black and yellow flounces.  
 You were always a good friend, but a special one.  
 Now as we brush through the clinging leaves we seem to hear you  
 crying;  
 You want us to come back, but it is too late to come back, isn't it?  
 It is too late to go to the places with the names (what were they,  
 anyway? just names).  
 It is too late to go anywhere but to the nearest star, that one, that hangs  
 just over the hill, beckoning  
 Like a hand of which the arm is not visible. Goodbye, Father! Goodbye,  
 pupils. Goodbye, my master and my dame.  
 We fly to the nearest star, whether it be red like a furnace, or yellow,  
 And we carry your lessons in our hearts (the lessons and our hearts are  
 the same)  
 Out of the humid classroom, into the forever. Goodbye, Old Dog Tray.  
  
 And so they have left us feeling tired and old.  
 They never cared for school anyway.  
 And they have left us with the things pinned on the bulletin board,  
 And the night, the endless, muggy night that is invading our school.

He cuts down the lakes so they appear straight  
He smiles at his feet in their tired mules.  
He turns up the music much louder.  
He takes down the vaseline from the pantry shelf.

He is the capricious smile behind the colored bottles.  
He eats not lest the poor want some.  
He breathes of attitudes the piney altitudes.  
He indeed is the White Cliffs of Dover.

He knows that his neck is frozen.  
He snorts in the vale of dim wolves.  
He writes to say, "If ever you visit this island,  
He'll grow you back to your childhood."

"He is the liar behind the hedge  
He grew one morning out of candor.  
He is his own consolation prize.  
He has had his eye on you from the beginning."

He hears the weak cut down with a smile.  
He waltzes tragically on the spitting housetops.  
He is never near. What you need  
He cancels with the air of one making a salad.

He is always the last to know.  
He is strength you once said was your bonnet.  
He has appeared in "Carmen."  
He is after us. If you decide

He is important, it will get you nowhere.  
He is the source of much bitter reflection.  
He used to be pretty for a rat.  
He is now over-proud of his Etruscan appearance.

He walks in his sleep into your life.  
He is worth knowing only for the children  
He has reared as savages in Utah.  
He helps his mother take in the clothes-line.

He is unforgettable as a shooting star.  
He is known as "Liverlips."  
He will tell you he has had a bad time of it.  
He will try to pretend his pressagent is a temptress.

He looks terrible on the stairs.  
He cuts himself on what he eats.  
He was last seen flying to New York.  
He was handing out cards which read:

"He wears a question in his left eye.  
He dislikes the police but will associate with them.  
He will demand something not on the menu.  
He is invisible to the eyes of beauty and culture.

"He prevented the murder of Mistinguett in Mexico.  
He has a knack for abortions. If you see  
He is following you, forget him immediately:  
He is dangerous even though asleep and unarmed."

## A LONG NOVEL

What will his crimes become, now that her hands  
Have gone to sleep? He gathers deeds

In the pure air, the agent  
Of their factual excesses. He laughs as she inhales.

If it could have ended before  
It began—the sorrow, the snow

Dropping, dropping its fine regrets.  
The myrtle dries about his lavish brow.

He stands quieter than the day, a breath  
In which all evils are one.

He is the purest air. But her patience,  
The imperative Become, trembles

Where hands have been before. In the foul air  
Each snowflake seems a Piranesi

Dropping in the past; his words are heavy  
With their final meaning. Milady! Mimosa! So the end

Was the same: the discharge of spittle  
Into frozen air. Except that, in a new

Humorous landscape, without music,  
Written by music, he knew he was a saint,

While she touched all goodness  
As golden hair, knowing its goodness

Impossible, and waking and waking  
As it grew in the eyes of the beloved

## *THE PIED PIPER*

Under the day's crust a half-eaten child  
And further sores which eyesight shall reveal  
And they live. But what of dark elders  
Whose touch at nightfall must now be  
To keep their promise? Misery  
Starches the host's one bed, his hand  
Falls like an axe on her curls:  
"Come in, come in! Better that the winter  
Blaze unseen, than we two sleep apart!"

Who in old age will often part  
From single sleep at the murmur  
Of acerb revels under the hill;  
Whose children couple as the earth crumbles  
In vanity forever going down  
A sunlit road, for his love was strongest  
Who never loved them at all, and his notes  
Most civil, laughing not to return.

# LE LIVRE EST SUR LA TABLE

## I

All beauty, resonance, integrity,  
Exist by deprivation or logic  
Of strange position. This being so,

We can only imagine a world in which a woman  
Walks and wears her hair and knows  
All that she does not know. Yet we know

What her breasts are. And we give fullness  
To the dream. The table supports the book,  
The plume leaps in the hand. But what

Dismal scene is this? The old man pouting  
At a black cloud, the woman gone  
Into the house, from which the wailing starts?

## II

The young man places a bird-house  
Against the blue sea. He walks away  
And it remains. Now other

Men appear, but they live in boxes.  
The sea protects them like a wall.  
The gods worship a line-drawing

Of a woman, in the shadow of the sea  
Which goes on writing. Are there  
Collisions, communications on the shore

Or did all secrets vanish when  
The woman left? Is the bird mentioned  
In the waves' minutes, or did the land advance?

From  
*THE*  
*TENNIS*  
*COURT*  
*OATH*



## *THOUGHTS OF A YOUNG GIRL*

"It is such a beautiful day I had to write you a letter  
From the tower, and to show I'm not mad:  
I only slipped on the cake of soap of the air  
And drowned in the bathtub of the world.  
You were too good to cry much over me.  
And now I let you go. Signed, 'The Dwarf.'"

I passed by late in the afternoon  
And the smile still played about her lips  
As it has for centuries. She always knows  
How to be utterly delightful. Oh my daughter,  
My sweetheart, daughter of my late employer, princess,  
May you not be long on the way!

*"HOW MUCH LONGER WILL I BE ABLE  
TO INHABIT THE DIVINE SEPULCHER . . ."*

How much longer will I be able to inhabit the divine sepulcher  
Of life, my great love? Do dolphins plunge bottomward  
To find the light? Or is it rock  
That is searched? Unrelentingly? Huh. And if some day

Men with orange shovels come to break open the rock  
Which encases me, what about the light that comes in then?  
What about the smell of the light?  
What about the moss?

In pilgrim times he wounded me  
Since then I only lie  
My bed of light is a furnace choking me  
With hell (and sometimes I hear salt water dripping).

I mean it—because I'm one of the few  
To have held my breath under the house. I'll trade  
One red sucker for two blue ones. I'm  
Named Tom. The

Light bounces off mossy rocks down to me  
In this glen (the neat villa! which  
When he'd had he would not had he of  
And jests under the smarting of privet

Which on hot spring nights perfumes the empty rooms  
With the smell of sperm flushed down toilets  
On hot summer afternoons within sight of the sea.  
If you knew why then professor) reads

To his friends: Drink to me only with  
And the reader is carried away  
By a great shadow under the sea.  
Behind the steering wheel

The boy took out his own forehead.  
His girlfriend's head was a green bag  
Of narcissus stems. "OK you win  
But meet me anyway at Cohen's Drug Store

In 22 minutes." What a marvel is ancient man!  
Under the tulip roots he has figured out a way to be a religious animal  
And would be a mathematician. But where in unsuitable heaven  
Can he get the heat that will make him grow?

For he needs something or will forever remain a dwarf,  
Though a perfect one, and possessing a normal-sized brain  
But he has got to be released by giants from things.  
And as the plant grows older it realizes it will never be a tree,

Will probably always be haunted by a bee  
And cultivates stupid impressions  
So as not to become part of the dirt. The dirt  
Is mounting like a sea. And we say goodbye

Shaking hands in front of the crashing of the waves  
That give our words lonesomeness, and make these flabby hands  
    seem ours—  
Hands that are always writing things  
On mirrors for people to see later—

Do you want them to water  
Plant, tear listlessly among the exchangeable ivy—  
Carrying food to mouth, touching genitals—  
But no doubt you have understood

It all now and I am a fool. It remains  
For me to get better, and to understand you so

Like a chair-sized man, Boots  
Were heard on the floor above. In the garden the sunlight was still purple

But what buzzed in it had changed slightly  
But not forever . . . but casting its shadow  
On sticks, and looking around for an opening in the air, was quite as if it  
had never refused to exist differently. Guys  
In the yard handled the belt he had made

Stars  
Painted the garage roof crimson and black  
He is not a man  
Who can read these signs . . . his bones were stays . . .

And even refused to live  
In a world and refunded the hiss  
Of all that exists terribly near us  
Like you, my love, and light.

For what is obedience but the air around us  
To the house? For which the federal men came  
In a minute after the sidewalk  
Had taken you home? ("Latin . . . blossom . . .")

After which you led me to water  
And bade me drink, which I did, owing to your kindness.  
You would not let me out for two days and three nights,  
Bringing me books bound in wild thyme and scented wild grasses

As if reading had any interest for me, you . . .  
Now you are laughing.  
Darkness interrupts my story.  
Turn on the light.

Meanwhile what am I going to do?  
I am growing up again, in school, the crisis will be very soon.  
And you twist the darkness in your fingers, you  
Who are slightly older . . .

Who are you, anyway?  
And it is the color of sand,  
The darkness, as it sifts through your hand  
Because what does anything mean,

The ivy and the sand? That boat  
Pulled up on the shore? Am I wonder,  
Strategically, and in the light  
Of the long sepulcher that hid death and hides me?

## WHITE ROSES

The worst side of it all—  
The white sunlight on the polished floor—  
Pressed into service,  
And then the window closed  
And the night ends and begins again.  
Her face goes green, her eyes are green,  
In the dark corner playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever." I try to  
describe for you,  
But you will not listen, you are like the swan.

No stars are there,  
No stripes,  
But a blind man's cane poking, however clumsily, into the inmost  
corners of the house.  
Nothing can be harmed! Night and day are beginning again!  
So put away the book,  
The flowers you were keeping to give someone:  
Only the white, tremendous foam of the street has any importance,  
The new white flowers that are beginning to shoot up about now.

## OUR YOUTH

Of bricks . . . Who built it? Like some crazy balloon  
When love leans on us  
Its nights . . . The velvety pavement sticks to our feet.  
The dead puppies turn us back on love.

Where we are. Sometimes  
The brick arches led to a room like a bubble, that broke when you  
entered it  
And sometimes to a fallen leaf.  
We got crazy with emotion, showing how much we knew.

The Arabs took us. We knew  
The dead horses. We were discovering coffee,  
How it is to be drunk hot, with bare feet  
In Canada. And the immortal music of Chopin

Which we had been discovering for several months  
Since we were fourteen years old. And coffee grounds,  
And the wonder of hands, and the wonder of the day  
When the child discovers her first dead hand.

Do you know it? Hasn't she  
Observed you too? Haven't you been observed to her?  
My, haven't the flowers been? Is the evil  
In't? What window? What did you say there?

Heh? Eh? Our youth is dead.  
From the minute we discover it with eyes closed  
Advancing into mountain light.  
Ouch . . . You will never have that young boy,

That boy with the monocle  
Could have been your father

He is passing by. No, that other one,  
Upstairs. He is the one who wanted to see you.

He is dead. Green and yellow handkerchiefs cover him.  
Perhaps he will never rot, I see  
That my clothes are dry. I will go.  
The naked girl crosses the street.

Blue hampers . . . Explosions,  
Ice . . . The ridiculous  
Vases of porphyry. All that our youth  
Can't use, that it was created for.

It's true we have not avoided our destiny  
By weeding out the old people.  
Our faces have filled with smoke. We escape  
Down the cloud ladder, but the problem has not been solved.

## *AN ADDITIONAL POEM*

Where then shall hope and fear their objects find?  
The harbor cold to the mating ships,  
And you have lost as you stand by the balcony  
With the forest of the sea calm and gray beneath.  
A strong impression torn from the descending light  
But night is guilty. You knew the shadow  
In the trunk was raving  
But as you keep growing hungry you forget.  
The distant box is open. A sound of grain  
Poured over the floor in some eagerness—we  
Rise with the night let out of the box of wind.

## FAUST

If only the phantom would stop reappearing!  
Business, if you wanted to know, was punk at the opera.  
The heroine no longer appeared in *Faust*.  
The crowds strolled sadly away. The phantom  
Watched them from the roof, not guessing the hungers  
That must be stirred before disappointment can begin.

One day as morning was about to begin  
A man in brown with a white shirt reappearing  
At the bottom of his yellow vest, was talking hungers  
With the silver-haired director of the opera.  
On the green-carpeted floor no phantom  
Appeared, except yellow squares of sunlight, like those in *Faust*.

That night as the musicians for *Faust*  
Were about to go on strike, lest darkness begin  
In the corridors, and through them the phantom  
Glide unobstructed, the vision reappearing  
Of blonde Marguerite practicing a new opera  
At her window awoke terrible new hungers

In the already starving tenor. But hungers  
Are just another topic, like the new Faust  
Drifting through the tunnels of the opera  
(In search of lost old age? For they begin  
To notice a twinkle in his eye. It is cold daylight reappearing  
At the window behind him, itself a phantom

Window, painted by the phantom  
Scene painters, sick of not getting paid, of hungers  
For a scene below of tiny, reappearing  
Dancers, with a sandbag falling like a note in *Faust*  
Through purple air. And the spectators begin  
To understand the bleeding tenor star of the opera.)

That night the opera  
Was crowded to the rafters. The phantom  
Took twenty-nine curtain calls. "Begin!  
Begin!" In the wings the tenor hungers  
For the heroine's convulsive kiss, and Faust  
Moves forward, no longer young, reappearing

And reappearing for the last time. The opera  
*Faust* would no longer need its phantom.  
On the bare, sunlit stage the hungers could begin.

## *A LAST WORLD*

These wonderful things  
Were planted on the surface of a round mind that was to become our  
present time.

The mark of things belongs to someone  
But if that somebody was wise  
Then the whole of things might be different  
From what it was thought to be in the beginning, before an angel bandaged  
the field glasses.

Then one could say nothing hear nothing  
Of what the great time spoke to its divisors.  
All borders between men were closed.  
Now all is different without having changed  
As though one were to pass through the same street at different times  
And nothing that is old can prefer the new.  
An enormous merit has been placed on the head of all things  
Which, bowing down, arrive near the region of their feet  
So that the earth-stone has stared at them in memory at the approach of an  
error.

Still it is not too late for these things to die  
Provided that an anemone will grab them and rush them to the wildest  
heaven.  
But having plucked oneself, who could live in the sunlight?  
And the truth is cold, as a giant's knee  
Will seem cold.

Yet having once played with tawny truth  
Having once looked at a cold mullet on a plate on a table supported by the  
weight of the inconstant universe  
He wished to go far away from himself.  
There were no baskets in those jovial pine-tree forests, and the waves  
pushed without whitecaps  
In that foam where he wished to be.

Man is never without woman, the neuter sex  
Casting up her equations, looks to her lord for loving kindness  
For man smiles never at woman.  
In the forests a night landslide could disclose that she smiled.  
Guns were fired to discourage dogs into the interior  
But woman—never. She is completely out of this world.  
She climbs a tree to see if he is coming  
Sunlight breaks at the edges of the wet lakes  
And she is happy, if free  
For the power he forces down at her like a storm of lightning.

Once a happy old man  
One can never change the core of things, and light burns you the harder  
for it.  
Glad of the changes already and if there are more it will never be you  
that minds  
Since it will not be you to be changed, but in the evening in the severe  
lamplight doubts come  
From many scattered distances, and do not come too near.  
As it falls along the house, your treasure  
Cries to the other men; the darkness will have none of you, and you are  
folded into it like mint into the sound of haying.  
It was ninety-five years ago that you strolled in the serene little port; under  
an enormous cornice six boys in black slowly stood.  
Six frock coats today, six black fungi tomorrow,  
And the day after tomorrow—but the day after tomorrow itself is  
blackening dust.  
You court obsidian pools  
And from a tremendous height twilight falls like a stone and hits you.  
  
You who were always in the way  
Flower  
Are you afraid of trembling like breath

But there is no breath in seriousness; the lake howls for it.  
Swiftly sky covers earth, the wrong breast for a child to suck, and that,  
What have you got there in your hand?  
It is a stone

So the passions are divided into tiniest units  
And of these many are lost, and those that remain are given at nightfall to  
the uneasy old man  
The old man who goes skipping along the roadbed.  
In a dumb harvest  
Passions are locked away, and states of creation are used instead, that is to  
say synonyms are used.

Honey  
On the lips of elders is not contenting, so  
A firebrand is made. Woman carries it,  
She who thought herself good only for bearing children is decked out in the  
lace of fire  
And this is exactly the way she wanted it, the trees coming to place  
themselves in her  
In a rite of torpor, dust.  
A bug carries the elixir  
Naked men pray the ground and chew it with their hands  
The fire lives  
Men are nabbed  
She her bonnet half off is sobbing there while the massacre yet  
continues with a terrific thin energy  
A silver blaze calms the darkness.

Rest undisturbed on the dry of the beach  
Flower  
And night stand suddenly sideways to observe your bones  
Vixen

Do men later go home  
Because we wanted to travel  
Under the kettle of trees  
We thought the sky would melt to see us  
But to tell the truth the air turned to smoke,  
We were forced back onto a foul pillow that was another place.  
Or were lost by our comrades  
Somewhere between heaven and no place, and were growing smaller.  
In another place a mysterious mist shot up like a wall, down which trickled  
the tears of our loved ones.  
Bananas rotten with their ripeness hung from the leaves, and cakes and  
jewels covered the sand.  
But these were not the best men  
But there were moments of the others  
Seen through indifference, only bare methods  
But we can remember them and so we are saved.

A last world moves on the figures;  
They are smaller than when we last saw them caring about them.  
The sky is a giant rocking horse  
And of the other things death is a new office building filled with modern  
furniture,  
A wise thing, but which has no purpose for us.

Everything is being blown away;  
A little horse trots up with a letter in its mouth, which is read with  
eagerness  
As we gallop into the flame.

## From *THE NEW REALISM*

There was calm rapture in the way she spoke  
Perhaps I would get over the way the joke  
Always turned against me, in the end.  
The bars had been removed from all the windows  
There was something quiet in the way the light entered  
Her trousseau. Wine fished out of the sea—they hadn't known  
We were coming relaxed forever  
We stood off the land because if you get too far  
From a perfume you can squeeze the life out of it  
One seal came into view and then the others  
Yellow in the vast sun.  
A watchdog performed and they triumphed  
The day was bleak—ice had replaced air  
The sigh of the children to former music  
Supplanting the mutt's yelps.  
This was as far as she would go—  
A tavern with plants.  
Dynamite out over the horizon  
And a sequel, and a racket. Dolphins repelling  
The sand. Squads of bulldozers  
Wrecked the site, and she died laughing  
Because only once does prosperity let you get away  
On your doorstep she used to explain  
How if the returning merchants in the morning hitched the rim of the van  
In the evening one must be very quick to give them the slip.  
The judge knocked. The zinnias  
Had never looked better—red, yellow, and blue  
They were, and the forget-me-nots and dahlias  
At least sixty different varieties  
As the shade went up  
And the ambulance came crashing through the dust  
Of the new day, the moon and the sun and the stars,  
And the iceberg slowly sank  
In the volcano and the sea ran far away  
Yellow over the hot sand, green as the green trees.

From  
*RIVERS*  
*AND*  
*MOUNTAINS*



## RIVERS AND MOUNTAINS

On the secret map the assassins  
Cloistered, the Moon River was marked  
Near the eighteen peaks and the city  
Of humiliation and defeat—wan ending  
Of the trail among dry, papery leaves  
Gray-brown quills like thoughts  
In the melodious but vast mass of today's  
Writing through fields and swamps  
Marked, on the map, with little bunches of weeds.  
Certainly squirrels lived in the woods  
But devastation and dull sleep still  
Hung over the land, quelled  
The rioters turned out of sleep in the peace of prisons  
Singing on marble factory walls  
Deaf consolation of minor tunes that pack  
The air with heavy invisible rods  
Pent in some sand valley from  
Which only quiet walking ever instructs.  
The bird flew over and  
Sat—there was nothing else to do,  
Do not mistake its silence for pride or strength  
Or the waterfall for a harbor  
Full of light boats that is there  
Performing for thousands of people  
In clothes some with places to go  
Or games. Sometimes over the pillar  
Of square stones its impact  
Makes a light print.

So going around cities  
To get to other places you found  
It all on paper but the land  
Was made of paper processed  
To look like ferns, mud or other

Whose sea unrolled its magic  
Distances and then rolled them up  
Its secret was only a pocket  
After all but some corners are darker  
Than these moonless nights spent as on a raft  
In the seclusion of a melody heard  
As though through trees  
And you can never ignite their touch  
Long but there were homes  
Flung far out near the asperities  
Of a sharp, rocky pinnacle  
And other collective places  
Shadows of vineyards whose wine  
Tasted of the forest floor  
Fisheries and oyster beds  
Tides under the pole  
Seminaries of instruction, public  
Places for electric light  
And the major tax assessment area  
Wrinkled on the plan  
Of election to public office  
Sixty-two years old bath and breakfast  
The formal traffic, shadows  
To make it not worth joining  
After the ox had pulled away the cart.

Your plan was to separate the enemy into two groups  
With the razor-edged mountains between.  
It worked well on paper  
But their camp had grown  
To be the mountains and the map  
Carefully peeled away and not torn  
Was the light, a tender but rough bark  
On everything. Fortunately the war was solved

In another way by isolating the two sections  
Of the enemy's navy so that the mainland  
Warded away the big floating ships.  
Light bounced off the ends  
Of the small gray waves to tell  
Them in the observatory  
About the great drama that was being won  
To turn off the machinery  
And quietly move among the rustic landscape  
Scooping snow off the mountains rinsing  
The coarser ones that love had  
Slowly risen in the night to overflow  
Wetting pillow and petal  
Determined to place the letter  
On the unassassinated president's desk  
So that a stamp could reproduce all this  
In detail, down to the last autumn leaf  
And the affliction of June ride  
Slowly out into the sun-blackened landscape.

## *LAST MONTH*

No changes of support—only  
Patches of gray, here where sunlight fell.  
The house seems heavier  
Now that they have gone away.  
In fact it emptied in record time.  
When the flat table used to result  
A match recedes, slowly, into the night.  
The academy of the future is  
Opening its doors and willing  
The fruitless sunlight streams into domes,  
The chairs piled high with books and papers.

The sedate one is this month's skittish one  
Confirming the property that,  
A timeless value, has changed hands.  
And you could have a new automobile  
Ping pong set and garage, but the thief  
Stole everything like a miracle.  
In his book there was a picture of treason only  
And in the garden, cries and colors.

## *IF THE BIRDS KNEW*

It is better this year.  
And the clothes they wear  
In the gray unweeded sky of our earth  
There is no possibility of change  
Because all of the true fragments are here.  
So I was glad of the fog's  
Taking me to you  
Undetermined summer thing eaten  
Of grief and passage—where you stay.  
The wheel is ready to turn again.  
When you have gone it will light up,  
The shadow of the spokes to drown  
Your departure where the summer knells  
Speak to grown dawn.  
There is after all a kind of promise  
To the affair of the waiting weather.  
We have learned not to be tired  
Among the lanterns of this year of sleep  
But someone pays—no transparency  
Has ever hardened us before  
To long piers of silence, and hedges  
Of understanding, difficult passing  
From one lesson to the next and the coldness  
Of the consistency of our lives'  
Devotion to immaculate danger.  
A leaf would have settled the disturbance  
Of the atmosphere, but at that high  
Valley's point disbanded  
Clouds that rocks smote newly  
The person or persons involved  
Parading slowly through the sunlit fields  
Not only as though the danger did not exist  
But as though the birds were in on the secret.

## *INTO THE DUSK-CHARGED AIR*

Far from the Rappahannock, the silent  
Danube moves along toward the sea.  
The brown and green Nile rolls slowly  
Like the Niagara's welling descent.  
Tractors stood on the green banks of the Loire  
Near where it joined the Cher.  
The St. Lawrence prods among black stones  
And mud. But the Arno is all stones.  
Wind ruffles the Hudson's  
Surface. The Irawaddy is overflowing.  
But the yellowish, gray Tiber  
Is contained within steep banks. The Isar  
Flows too fast to swim in, the Jordan's water  
Courses over the flat land. The Allegheny and its boats  
Were dark blue. The Moskowa is  
Gray boats. The Amstel flows slowly.  
Leaves fall into the Connecticut as it passes  
Underneath. The Liffey is full of sewage,  
Like the Seine, but unlike  
The brownish-yellow Dordogne.  
Mountains hem in the Colorado  
And the Oder is very deep, almost  
As deep as the Congo is wide.  
The plain banks of the Neva are  
Gray. The dark Saône flows silently.  
And the Volga is long and wide  
As it flows across the brownish land. The Ebro  
Is blue, and slow. The Shannon flows  
Swiftly between its banks. The Mississippi  
Is one of the world's longest rivers, like the Amazon.  
It has the Missouri for a tributary.  
The Harlem flows amid factories  
And buildings. The Nelson is in Canada,  
Flowing. Through hard banks the Dubawnt



The shadows. The Theiss, stark mad, bubbled  
 In the windy evening. And the Ob shuffled  
 Crazily along. Fat billows encrusted the Dniester's  
 Pallid flood, and the Fraser's porous surface.  
 Fish gasped amid the Spree's reeds. A boat  
 Descended the bobbing Orinoco. When the  
 Marne flowed by the plants nodded  
 And above the glistening Gila  
 A sunset as beautiful as the Athabasca  
 Stammered. The Zambezi chimed. The Oxus  
 Flowed somewhere. The Paranaíba  
 Is flowing, like the wind-washed Cumberland.  
 The Araguaia flows in the rain.  
 And, through overlying rocks the Isère  
 Cascades gently. The Guadalquivir sputtered.  
 Someday time will confound the Indre,  
 Making a rill of the Huang Ho. And  
 The Potomac rumbles softly. Crested birds  
 Watch the Ucayali go  
 Through dreaming night. You cannot stop  
 The Yenisei. And afterwards  
 The White flows strongly to its . . .  
 Goal. If the Tyne's shores  
 Hold you, and the Albany  
 Arrest your development, can you resist the Red's  
 Musk, the Meuse's situation?  
 A particle of mud in the Neckar  
 Does not turn it black. You cannot  
 Like the Saskatchewan, nor refuse  
 The meandering Yangtze, unleash  
 The Genesee. Does the Scamander  
 Still irrigate crimson plains? And the Durance  
 And the Pechora? The São Francisco  
 Skulks amid gray, rubbery nettles. The Liard's

Reflexes are slow, and the Arkansas erodes  
Anthracite hummocks. The Paraná stinks.  
'The Ottawa is light emerald green  
Among grays. Better that the Indus fade  
In steaming sands! Let the Brazos  
Freeze solid! And the Wabash turn to a leaden  
Cinder of ice! The Marañón is too tepid, we must  
Find a way to freeze it hard. The Ural  
Is freezing slowly in the blasts. The black Yonne  
Congeals nicely. And the Petit-Morin  
Curls up on the solid earth. The Inn  
Does not remember better times, and the Merrimack's  
Galvanized. The Ganges is liquid snow by now;  
The Vyatka's ice-gray. The once-molten Tennessee's  
Curdled. The Japurá is a pack of ice. Gelid  
The Columbia's gray loam banks. The Don's merely  
A giant icicle. The Niger freezes, slowly.  
The interminable Lena plods on  
But the Purus' mercurial waters are icy, grim  
With cold. The Loing is choked with fragments of ice.  
The Weser is frozen, like liquid air.  
And so is the Kama. And the beige, thickly flowing  
Tocantins. The rivers bask in the cold.  
The stern Uruguay chafes its banks,  
A mass of ice. The Hooghly is solid  
Ice. The Adour is silent, motionless.  
The lovely Tigris is nothing but scratchy ice  
Like the Yellowstone, with its osier-clustered banks.  
The Mekong is beginning to thaw out a little  
And the Donets gurgles beneath the  
Huge blocks of ice. The Manzanares gushes free.  
The Illinois darts through the sunny air again.  
But the Dnieper is still ice-bound. Somewhere  
The Salado propels its floes, but the Roosevelt's

Frozen. The Oka is frozen solid  
Than the Somme. The Minho slumbers  
In winter, nor does the Snake  
Remember August. Hilarious, the Canadian  
Is solid ice. The Madeira slavers  
Across the thawing fields, and the Plata laughs.  
The Dvina soaks up the snow. The Sava's  
Temperature is above freezing. The Avon  
Carols noiselessly. The Drôme presses  
Grass banks; the Adige's frozen  
Surface is like gray pebbles.

Birds circle the Ticino. In winter  
The Var was dark blue, unfrozen. The  
Thwaite, cold, is choked with sandy ice;  
The Ardèche glistens feebly through the freezing rain.

## THE ECCLESIAST

"Worse than the sunflower," she had said.  
But the new dimension of truth had only recently  
Burst in on us. Now it was to be condemned.  
And in vagrant shadow her mothball truth is eaten.  
In cool, like-it-or-not shadow the humdrum is consumed.  
Tired housewives begat it some decades ago,  
A small piece of truth that if it was honey to the lips  
Was also millions of miles from filling the place reserved for it.  
You see how honey crumbles your universe  
Which seems like an institution—how many walls?

Then everything, in her belief, was to be submerged  
And soon. There was no life you could live out to its end  
And no attitude which, in the end, would save you.  
The monkish and the frivolous alike were to be trapped  
in death's capacious claw  
But listen while I tell you about the wallpaper—  
There was a key to everything in that oak forest  
But a sad one. Ever since childhood there  
Has been this special meaning to everything.  
You smile at your friend's joke, but only later, through tears.

For the shoe pinches, even though it fits perfectly.  
Apples were made to be gathered, also the whole host of the  
world's ailments and troubles.  
There is no time like the present for giving in to this temptation.  
Tomorrow you'll weep—what of it? There is time enough  
Once the harvest is in and the animals put away for the winter  
To stand at the uncomprehending window cultivating the desert  
With salt tears which will never do anyone any good.  
My dearest I am as a galleon on salt billows.  
Perfume my head with forgetting all about me.

For some day these projects will return.  
The funereal voyage over ice-strewn seas is ended.  
You wake up forgetting. Already  
Daylight shakes you in the yard.  
The hands remain empty. They are constructing an osier basket  
Just now, and across the sunlight darkness is taking root anew  
In intense activity. You shall never have seen it just this way  
And that is to be your one reward.

Fine vapors escape from whatever is doing the living.  
The night is cold and delicate and full of angels  
Pounding down the living. The factories are all lit up,  
The chime goes unheard.  
We are together at last, though far apart.

## *THE RECENT PAST*

Perhaps we ought to feel with more imagination.  
As today the sky 70 degrees above zero with lines falling  
The way September moves a lace curtain to be near a pear,  
The oddest device can't be usual. And that is where  
The pejorative sense of fear moves axles. In the stars  
There is no longer any peace, emptied like a cup of coffee  
Between the blinding rain that interviews.

You were my quintuplets when I decided to leave you  
Opening a picture book the pictures were all of grass  
Slowly the book was on fire, you the reader  
Sitting with specs full of smoke exclaimed  
How it was a rhyme for "brick" or "redder."  
The next chapter told all about a brook.  
You were beginning to see the relation when a tidal wave  
Arrived with sinking ships that spelled out "Aladdin."  
I thought about the Arab boy in his cave  
But the thoughts came faster than advice.  
If you knew that snow was a still toboggan in space  
The print could rhyme with "fallen star."

## *A BLESSING IN DISGUISE*

Yes, they are alive and can have those colors,  
But I, in my soul, am alive too.  
I feel I must sing and dance, to tell  
Of this in a way, that knowing you may be drawn to me.

And I sing amid despair and isolation  
Of the chance to know you, to sing of me  
Which are you. You see,  
You hold me up to the light in a way

I should never have expected, or suspected, perhaps  
Because you always tell me I am you,  
And right. The great spruces loom.  
I am yours to die with, to desire.

I cannot ever think of me, I desire you  
For a room in which the chairs ever  
Have their backs turned to the light  
Inflicted on the stone and paths, the real trees

That seem to shine at me through a lattice toward you.  
If the wild light of this January day is true  
I pledge me to be truthful unto you  
Whom I cannot ever stop remembering.

Remembering to forgive. Remember to pass beyond you into the day  
On the wings of the secret you will never know.  
Taking me from myself, in the path  
Which the pastel girth of the day has assigned to me.

I prefer "you" in the plural, I want "you,"  
You must come to me, all golden and pale  
Like the dew and the air.  
And then I start getting this feeling of exaltation.

## CLEPSYDRA

Hasn't the sky? Returned from moving the other  
Authority recently dropped, wrested as much of  
That severe sunshine as you need now on the way  
You go. The reason why it happened only since  
You woke up is letting the steam disappear  
From those clouds when the landscape all around  
Is hilly sites that will have to be reckoned  
Into the total for there to be more air: that is,  
More fitness read into the undeduced result, than land.  
This means never getting any closer to the basic  
Principle operating behind it than to the distracted  
Entity of a mirage. The half-meant, half-perceived  
Motions of fronds out of idle depths that are  
Summer. And expansion into little draughts.  
The reply awakens easily, darting from  
Untruth to willed moment, scarcely called into being  
Before it swells, the way a waterfall  
Drums at different levels. Each moment  
Of utterance is the true one; likewise none are true,  
Only is the bounding from air to air, a serpentine  
Gesture which hides the truth behind a congruent  
Message, the way air hides the sky, is, in fact,  
Tearing it limb from limb this very moment: but  
The sky has pleaded already and this is about  
As graceful a kind of non-absence as either  
Has a right to expect: whether it's the form of  
Some creator who has momentarily turned away,  
Marrying detachment with respect, so that the pieces  
Are seen as parts of a spectrum, independent  
Yet symbolic of their staggered times of arrival;  
Whether on the other hand all of it is to be  
Seen as no luck. A recurring whiteness like  
The face of stone pleasure, urging forward as  
Nostrils what only meant dust. But the argument,

That is its way, has already left these behind: it  
Is, it would have you believe, the white din up ahead  
That matters: unformed yells, rocketings,  
Affected turns, and tones of voice called  
By upper shadows toward some cloud of belief  
Or its unstated circumference. But the light  
Has already gone from there too and it may be that  
It is lines contracting into a plane. We hear so much  
Of its further action that at last it seems that  
It is we, our taking it into account rather, that are  
The reply that prompted the question, and  
That the latter, like a person waking on a pillow  
Has the sensation of having dreamt the whole thing,  
Of returning to participate in that dream, until  
The last word is exhausted; certainly this is  
Peace of a sort, like nets drying in the sun,  
That we must progress toward the whole thing  
About an hour ago. As long as it is there  
You will desire it as its tag of wall sinks  
Deeper as though hollowed by sunlight that  
Just fits over it; it is both mirage and the little  
That was present, the miserable totality  
Mustered at any given moment, like your eyes  
And all they speak of, such as your hands, in lost  
Accents beyond any dream of ever wanting them again.  
To have this to be constantly coming back from—  
Nothing more, really, than surprise at your absence  
And preparing to continue the dialogue into  
Those mysterious and near regions that are  
Precisely the time of its being furthered.  
Seeing it, as it was, dividing that time,  
Casting colored paddles against the welter  
Of a future of disunion just to abolish confusion  
And permit level walks into the gaze of its standing

Around admiringly, it was then, that it was these  
Moments that were the truth, although each tapered  
Into the distant surrounding night. But  
Wasn't it their blindness, instead, and wasn't this  
The fact of being so turned in on each other that  
Neither would ever see his way clear again? It  
Did not stagger the imagination so long as it stayed  
This way, comparable to exclusion from the light of the stars  
That drenched every instant of that being, in an egoistic way,  
As though their round time were only the reverse  
Of some more concealable, vengeful purpose to become known  
Once its result had more or less established  
The look of the horizon. But the condition  
Of those moments of timeless elasticity and blindness  
Was being joined secretly so  
That their paths would cross again and be separated  
Only to join again in a final assumption rising like a shout  
And be endless in the discovery of the declamatory  
Nature of the distance traveled. All this is  
Not without small variations and surprises, yet  
An invisible fountain continually destroys and refreshes the previsions.  
Then is their permanence merely a function of  
The assurance with which it's understood, assurance  
Which, you might say, goes a long way toward conditioning  
Whatever result? But there was no statement  
At the beginning. There was only a breathless waste,  
A dumb cry shaping everything in projected  
After-effects orphaned by playing the part intended for them,  
Though one must not forget that the nature of this  
Emptiness, these previsions,  
Was that it could only happen here, on this page held  
Too close to be legible, sprouting erasures, except that they  
Ended everything in the transparent sphere of what was  
Intended only a moment ago, spiraling further out, its

Gesture finally dissolving in the weather.  
It was the long way back out of sadness  
Of that first meeting: a half-triumph, an imaginary feeling  
Which still protected its events and pauses, the way  
A telescope protects its view of distant mountains  
And all they include, the coming and going,  
Moving correctly up to other levels, preparing to spend the night  
There where the tiny figures halt as darkness comes on,  
Beside some loud torrent in an empty yet personal  
Landscape, which has the further advantage of being  
What surrounds without insisting, the very breath so  
Honorably offered, and accepted in the same spirit.  
There was in fact pleasure in those high walls.  
Each moment seemed to bore back into the centuries  
For profit and manners, and an old way of looking that  
Continually shaped those lips into a smile. Or it was  
Like standing at the edge of a harbor early on a summer morning  
With the discreet shadows cast by the water all around  
And a feeling, again, of emptiness, but of richness in the way  
The whole thing is organized, on what a miraculous scale,  
Really what is meant by a human level, with the figures of giants  
Not too much bigger than the men who have come to petition them:  
A moment that gave not only itself, but  
Also the means of keeping it, of not turning to dust  
Or gestures somewhere up ahead  
But of becoming complicated like the torrent  
In new dark passages, tears and laughter which  
Are a sign of life, of distant life in this case.  
And yet, as always happens, there would come a moment when  
Acts no longer sufficed and the calm  
Of this true progression hardened into shreds  
Of another kind of calm, returning to the conclusion, its premises  
Undertaken before any formal agreement had been reached, hence  
A writ that was the shadow of the colossal reason behind all this

Like a second, rigid body behind the one you know is yours.  
And it was in vain that tears blotted the contract now, because  
It had been freely drawn up and consented to as insurance  
Against the very condition it was now so efficiently  
Seeking to establish. It had reduced that other world,  
The round one of the telescope, to a kind of very fine powder or dust  
So small that space could not remember it.  
Thereafter any signs of feeling were cut short by  
The comfort and security, a certain elegance even,  
Like the fittings of a ship, that are after all  
The most normal things in the world. Yes, perhaps, but the words  
"After all" are important for understanding the almost  
Exaggerated strictness of the condition, and why, in spite of this,  
It seemed the validity of the former continuing was  
Not likely to be reinstated for a long time.  
"After all," that too might be possible, as indeed  
All kinds of things are possible in the widening angle of  
The day, as it comes to blush with pleasure and increase,  
So that light sinks into itself, becomes dark and heavy  
Like a surface stained with ink: there was something  
Not quite good or correct about the way  
Things were looking recently: hadn't the point  
Of all this new construction been to provide  
A protected medium for the exchanges each felt of such vital  
Concern, and wasn't it now giving itself the airs of a palace?  
And yet her hair had never been so long.  
It was a feeling of well-being, if you will, as though a smallest  
Distant impulse had rendered the whole surface ultra-sensitive  
But its fierceness was still acquiescence  
To the nature of this goodness already past  
And it was a kind of sweet acknowledgment of how  
The past is yours, to keep invisible if you wish  
But also to make absurd elaborations with  
And in this way prolong your dance of non-discovery

In brittle, useless architecture that is nevertheless  
The map of your desires, irreproachable, beyond  
Madness and the toe of approaching night, if only  
You desire to arrange it this way. Your acts  
Are sentinels against this quiet  
Invasion. Long may you prosper, and may your years  
Be the throes of what is even now exhausting itself  
In one last effort to outwit us; it could only be a map  
Of the world; in their defeat such peninsulas as become  
Prolongations of our reluctance to approach, but also  
Fine days on whose memorable successions of events  
We shall be ever afterwards tempted to dwell. I am  
Not speaking of a partially successful attempt to be  
Opposite; anybody at all can read that page, it has only  
To be thrust in front of him. I mean now something much broader,  
The sum total of all the private aspects that can ever  
Become legible in what is outside, as much in the rocks  
And foliage as in the invisible look of the distant  
Ether and in the iron fist that suddenly closes over your own.  
I see myself in this totality, and meanwhile  
I am only a transparent diagram, of manners and  
Private words with the certainty of being about to fall.  
And even this crumb of life I also owe to you  
For being so close as to seal out knowledge of that other  
Voluntary life, and so keep its root in darkness until your  
Maturity when your hair will actually be the branches  
Of a tree with the light pouring through them.  
It intensifies echoes in such a way as to  
Form a channel to absorb every correct motion.  
In this way any direction taken was the right one,  
Leading first to you, and through you to  
Myself that is beyond you and which is the same thing as space,  
That is the stammering vehicles that remain unknown,  
Eating the sky in all sincerity because the difference

Can never be made up: therefore, why not examine the distance?  
It seemed he had been repeating the same stupid phrase  
Over and over throughout his life; meanwhile  
Infant destinies had suavely matured; there was  
To be a meeting or collection of them that very evening.  
He was out of it of course for having lain happily awake  
On the tepid fringes of that field or whatever  
Whose center was beginning to churn darkly, but even more  
for having  
The progression of minutes by accepting them, as one accepts  
drops of rain  
As they form a shower, and without worrying about the fine  
weather that will come after.  
Why shouldn't all climate and all music be equal  
Without growing? There should be an invariable balance of  
Contentment to hold everything in place, ministering  
To stunted memories, helping them stand alone  
And return into the world, without ever looking back at  
What they might have become, even though in doing so they  
Might just once have been the truth that, invisible,  
Still surrounds us like the air and is the dividing force  
Between our slightest steps and the notes taken on them.  
It is because everything is relative  
That we shall never see in that sphere of pure wisdom and  
Entertainment much more than groping shadows of an incomplete  
Former existence so close it burns like the mouth that  
Closes down over all your effort like the moment  
Of death, but stays, raging and burning the design of  
Its intentions into the house of your brain, until  
You wake up alone, the certainty that it  
Wasn't a dream your only clue to why the walls  
Are turning on you and why the windows no longer speak  
Of time but are themselves, transparent guardians you  
Invented for what there was to hide. Which has now

Grown up, or moved away, as a jewel  
Exists when there is no one to look at it, and this  
Existence saps your own. Perhaps you are being kept here  
Only so that somewhere else the peculiar light of someone's  
Purpose can blaze unexpectedly in the acute  
Angles of the rooms. It is not a question, then,  
Of having not lived in vain. What is meant is that this distant  
Image of you, the way you really are, is the test  
Of how you see yourself, and regardless of whether or not  
You hesitate, it may be assumed that you have won, that this  
Wooden and external representation  
Returns the full echo of what you meant  
With nothing left over, from that circumference now alight  
With ex-possibilities become present fact, and you  
Must wear them like clothing, moving in the shadow of  
Your single and twin existence, waking in intact  
Appreciation of it, while morning is still and before the body  
Is changed by the faces of evening.

## From *THE SKATERS*

### *From II*

Old heavens, you used to tweak above us,  
Standing like rain whenever a salvo . . . Old heavens,  
You lying there above the old, but not ruined, fort,  
Can you hear, there, what I am saying?

For it is you I am parodying,  
Your invisible denials. And the almost correct impressions  
Corroborated by newsprint, which is so fine.  
I call to you there, but I do not think that you will answer me.

For I am condemned to drum my fingers  
On the closed lid of this piano, this tedious planet, earth  
As it winks to you through the aspiring, growing distances,  
A last spark before the night.

There was much to be said in favor of storms  
But you seem to have abandoned them in favor of endless light.  
I cannot say that I think the change much of an improvement.  
There is something fearful in these summer nights that go on forever. . . .

We are nearing the Moorish coast, I think, in a *bateau*.  
I wonder if I will have any friends there  
Whether the future will be kinder to me than the past, for example,  
And am all set to be put out, finding it to be not.

Still, I am prepared for this voyage, and for anything else you may care to  
mention.

Not that I am not afraid, but there is very little time left.  
You have probably made travel arrangements, and know the feeling.  
Suddenly, one morning, the little train arrives in the station, but oh, so big

It is! Much bigger and faster than anyone told you.

A bearded student in an old baggy overcoat is waiting to take it.

"Why do you want to go *there*," they all say. "It is better in the other direction."

And so it is. There people are free, at any rate. But where you are going no one is.

Still there are parks and libraries to be visited, "la Bibliothèque Municipale,"

Hotel reservations and all that rot. Old American films dubbed into the foreign language,

Coffee and whiskey and cigar stubs. Nobody minds. And rain on the bristly wool of your topcoat.

I realize that I never knew why I wanted to come.

Yet I shall never return to the past, that attic.

Its sailboats are perhaps more beautiful than these, these I am leaning against,

Spangled with diamonds and orange and purple stains,

Bearing me once again in quest of the unknown. These sails are life itself to me.

I heard a girl say this once, and cried, and brought her fresh fruit and fishes,

Olives and golden baked loaves. She dried her tears and thanked me.

Now we are both setting sail into the purplish evening.

I love it! This cruise can never last long enough for me.

But once more, office desks, radiators—No! That is behind me.

No more dullness, only movies and love and laughter, sex and fun.

The ticket seller is blowing his little horn—hurry before the window slams down.

The train we are getting onto is a boat train, and the boats are really boats this time.

But I heard the heavens say—Is it right? This continual changing back  
and forth?

Laughter and tears and so on? Mightn't just plain sadness be sufficient for  
him?

No! I'll not accept that any more, you bewhiskered old caverns of blue!  
This is just right for me. I am cozily ensconced in the balcony of my face

Looking out over the whole darn countryside, a beacon of satisfaction  
I am. I'll not trade places with a king. Here I am then, continuing but ever  
beginning

My perennial voyage, into new memories, new hope and flowers  
The way the coasts glide past you. I shall never forget this moment

Because it consists of purest ecstasy. I am happier now than I ever dared  
believe

Anyone could be. And we finger down the dog-eared coasts. . . .

It is all passing! It is past! No, I am here,  
Bellow the coasts, and even the heavens roar their assent

As we pick up a lemon-colored light horizontally  
Projected into the night, the night that heaven  
Was kind enough to send, and I launch into the happiest dreams,  
Happier once again, because tomorrow is already here.

Yet certain kernels remain. Clouds that drift past sheds—  
Read it in the official bulletin. We shan't be putting out today.  
The old stove smoked worse than ever because rain was coming down its  
chimney.

Only the bleary eye of fog accosted one through the mended pane.

Outside, the swamp water lapped the broken wood step.  
A rowboat was moored in the alligator-infested swamp.

Somewhere, from deep in the interior of the jungle, a groan was heard.  
Could it be . . . ? Anyway, a rainy day—wet weather.

The whole voyage will have to be canceled.  
It would be impossible to make different connections.  
Besides, the hotels are all full at this season. The junks packed with  
refugees  
Returning from the islands. Sea-bream and flounder abound in the  
muddied waters. . . .

They in fact represent the backbone of the island economy.  
That, and cigar rolling. Please leave your papers at the desk as you pass  
out,  
You know. "The Wedding March." Ah yes, that's the way. The couple  
descend  
The steps of the little old church. Ribbons are flung, ribbons of cloud

And the sun seems to be coming out. But there have been so many false  
alarms. . . .  
No, it's happened! The storm is over. Again the weather is fine and clear.  
And the voyage? It's on! Listen everybody, the ship is starting,  
I can hear its whistle's roar! We have just time enough to make it to the  
dock!

And away they pour, in the sulfurous sunlight,  
To the aqua and silver waters where stands the glistening white ship  
And into the great vessel they flood, a motley and happy crowd  
Chanting and pouring down hymns on the surface of the ocean. . . .

Pulling, tugging us along with them, by means of streamers,  
Golden and silver confetti. Smiling, we laugh and sing with the  
revelers

But are not quite certain that we want to go—the dock is so sunny and warm.

That majestic ship will pull up anchor who knows where?

And full of laughter and tears, we sidle once again with the other passengers.

The ground is heaving under foot. Is it the ship? It could be the dock. . . .  
And with a great whoosh all the sails go up. . . . Hideous black smoke belches forth from the funnels

Smudging the gold carnival costumes with the gaiety of its jet-black soot

And, as into a tunnel the voyage starts

Only, as I said, to be continued. The eyes of those left standing on the dock are wet

But ours are dry. Into the secretive, vaporous night with all of us!  
Into the unknown, the unknown that loves us, the great unknown!

#### IV

The wind thrashes the maple seed-pods,

The whole brilliant mass comes spattering down.

This is my fourteenth year as governor of C province.

I was little more than a lad when I first came here.

Now I am old but scarcely any wiser.

So little are white hair and a wrinkled forehead a sign of wisdom!

To slowly raise oneself

Hand over hand, lifting one's entire weight;

To forget there was a possibility

Of some more politic movement. That freedom, courage

And pleasant company could exist.

That has always been behind you.

An earlier litigation: wind hard in the tops

Of the baggy eucalyptus branches.

Today I wrote, "The spring is late this year.  
In the early mornings there is hoarfrost on the water meadows.  
And on the highway the frozen ruts are papered over with ice."

The day was gloves.

How far from the usual statement  
About time, ice—the weather itself had gone.

I mean this. Through the years  
You have approached an inventory  
And it is now that tomorrow  
Is going to be the climax of your casual  
Statement about yourself, begun  
So long ago in humility and false quietude.

The sands are frantic  
In the hourglass. But there is time  
To change, to utterly destroy  
That too-familiar image  
Lurking in the glass  
Each morning, at the edge of the mirror.

The train is still sitting in the station.  
You only dreamed it was in motion.

There are a few travelers on Z high road.  
Behind a shutter, two black eyes are watching them.  
They belong to the wife of P, the high-school principal.

The screen door bangs in the wind, one of the hinges is loose.  
And together we look back at the house.  
It could use a coat of paint  
Except that I am too poor to hire a workman.

I have all I can do to keep body and soul together  
And soon, even that relatively simple task may prove to be beyond my  
powers.

That was a good joke you played on the other guests.  
A joke of silence.

One seizes these moments as they come along, afraid  
To believe too much in the happiness that might result  
Or confide too much of one's love and fear, even in  
Oneself.

The spring, though mild, is incredibly wet.  
I have spent the afternoon blowing soap bubbles  
And it is with a feeling of delight I realize I am  
All alone in the skittish darkness.  
The birch-pods come clattering down on the weed-grown marble  
pavement.  
And a curl of smoke stands above the triangular wooden roof.

Seventeen years in the capital of Foo-Yung province!  
Surely woman was born for something  
Besides continual fornication, retarded only by menstrual cramps.

I had thought of announcing my engagement to you  
On the day of the first full moon of X month.

The wind has stopped, but the magnolia blossoms still  
Fall with a plop onto the dry, spongy earth.  
The evening air is pestiferous with midges.

There is only one way of completing the puzzle:  
By finding a hog-shaped piece that is light green shading to buff at one  
side.

It is the beginning of March, a few  
Russet and yellow wallflowers are blooming in the border  
Protected by moss-grown, fragmentary masonry.

One morning you appear at breakfast  
Dressed, as for a journey, in your worst suit of clothes.  
And over a pot of coffee, or, more accurately, rusted water  
Announce your intention of leaving me alone in this cistern-like house.  
In your own best interests I shall decide not to believe you.

I think there is a funny sand bar  
Beyond the old boardwalk  
Your intrigue makes you understand.

"At thirty-two I came up to take my examination at the university.  
The U wax factory, it seemed, wanted a new general manager.  
I was the sole applicant for the job, but it was refused me.  
So I have preferred to finish my life  
In the quietude of this floral retreat."

The tiresome old man is telling us his life story.

Trout are circling under water—

Masters of eloquence  
Glisten on the pages of your book  
Like mountains veiled by water or the sky.

The "second position"  
Comes in the seventeenth year  
Watching the meaningless gyrations of flies above a sill.

Heads in hands, waterfall of simplicity.  
The delta of living into everything.

The pump is busted. I shall have to get it fixed.

Your knotted hair  
Around your shoulders  
A shawl the color of the spectrum

Like that marvelous thing you haven't learned yet.

To refuse the square hive,  
postpone the highest . . .

The apples are all getting tinted  
In the cool light of autumn.

The constellations are rising  
In perfect order: Taurus, Leo, Gemini.

From  
*THE*  
*DOUBLE*  
*DREAM*  
*OF*  
*SPRING*



## THE TASK

They are preparing to begin again:  
Problems, new pennant up the flagpole  
In a predicated romance.

About the time the sun begins to cut laterally across  
The western hemisphere with its shadows, its carnival echoes,  
The fugitive lands crowd under separate names.  
It is the blankness that follows gaiety, and Everyman must depart  
Out there into stranded night, for his destiny  
Is to return unfruitful out of the lightness  
That passing time evokes. It was only  
Cloud-castles, adept to seize the past  
And possess it, through hurting. And the way is clear  
Now for linear acting into that time  
In whose corrosive mass he first discovered how to breathe.

Just look at the filth you've made,  
See what you've done.  
Yet if these are regrets they stir only lightly  
The children playing after supper,  
Promise of the pillow and so much in the night to come.  
I plan to stay here a little while  
For these are moments only, moments of insight,  
And there are reaches to be attained,  
A last level of anxiety that melts  
In becoming, like miles under the pilgrim's feet.

## *SPRING DAY*

The immense hope, and forbearance  
Trailing out of night, to sidewalks of the day  
Like air breathed into a paper city, exhaled  
As night returns bringing doubts

That swarm around the sleeper's head  
But are fended off with clubs and knives, so that morning  
Installs again in cold hope  
The air that was yesterday, is what you are,

In so many phases the head slips from the hand.  
The tears ride freely, laughs or sobs:  
What do they matter? There is free giving and taking;  
The giant body relaxed as though beside a stream

Wakens to the force of it and has to recognize  
The secret sweetness before it turns into life—  
Sucked out of many exchanges, torn from the womb,  
Disinterred before completely dead—and heaves

Its mountain-broad chest. "They were long in coming,  
Those others, and mattered so little that it slowed them  
To almost nothing. They were presumed dead,  
Their names honorably grafted on the landscape

To be a memory to men. Until today  
We have been living in their shell.  
Now we break forth like a river breaking through a dam,  
Pausing over the puzzled, frightened plain,

And our further progress shall be terrible,  
Turning fresh knives in the wounds  
In that gulf of recreation, that bare canvas  
As matter of fact as the traffic and the day's noise."

The mountain stopped shaking; its body  
Arched into its own contradiction, its enjoyment,  
As far from us lights were put out, memories of boys and girls  
Who walked here before the great change,

Before the air mirrored us,  
Taking the opposite shape of our effort,  
Its inseparable comment and corollary  
But casting us farther and farther out.

Wha—what happened? You are with  
The orange tree, so that its summer produce  
Can go back to where we got it wrong, then drip gently  
Into history, if it wants to. A page turned; we were

Just now floundering in the wind of its colossal death.  
And whether it is Thursday, or the day is stormy,  
With thunder and rain, or the birds attack each other,  
We have rolled into another dream.

No use charging the barriers of that other:  
It no longer exists. But you,  
Gracious and growing thing, with those leaves like stars,  
We shall soon give all our attention to you.

## *PLAINNESS IN DIVERSITY*

Silly girls your heads full of boys  
There is a last sample of talk on the outer side  
Your stand at last lifts to dumb evening.  
It is reflected in the steep blue sides of the crater,  
So much water shall wash over these our breaths  
Yet shall remain unwashed at the end. The fine  
Branches of the fir tree catch at it, ebbing.  
Not on our planet is the destiny  
That can make you one.

To be placed on the side of some mountain  
Is the truer story, with the breath only  
Coming in patches at first, and then the little spurt  
The way a steam engine starts up eventually.  
The sagas purposely ignore how better off it was next day,  
The feeling in between the chapters, like fins.  
There is so much they must say, and it is important  
About all the swimming motions, and the way the hands  
Came up out of the ocean with original fronds,  
The famous arrow, the girls who came at dawn  
To pay a visit to the young child, and how, when he grew up to be a man  
The same restive ceremony replaced the limited years between,  
Only now he was old, and forced to begin the journey to the sun.

## SOONEST MENDED

Barely tolerated, living on the margin  
In our technological society, we were always having to be rescued  
On the brink of destruction, like heroines in *Orlando Furioso*  
Before it was time to start all over again.  
'There would be thunder in the bushes, a rustling of coils,  
And Angelica, in the Ingres painting, was considering  
The colorful but small monster near her toe, as though wondering  
whether forgetting  
'The whole thing might not, in the end, be the only solution.  
And then there always came a time when  
Happy Hooligan in his rusted green automobile  
Came plowing down the course, just to make sure everything was O.K.,  
Only by that time we were in another chapter and confused  
About how to receive this latest piece of information.  
Was it information? Weren't we rather acting this out  
For someone else's benefit, thoughts in a mind  
With room enough and to spare for our little problems (so they began to  
seem),  
Our daily quandary about food and the rent and bills to be paid?  
'To reduce all this to a small variant,  
'To step free at last, minuscule on the gigantic plateau—  
This was our ambition: to be small and clear and free.  
Alas, the summer's energy wanes quickly,  
A moment and it is gone. And no longer  
May we make the necessary arrangements, simple as they are.  
Our star was brighter perhaps when it had water in it.  
Now there is no question even of that, but only  
Of holding on to the hard earth so as not to get thrown off,  
With an occasional dream, a vision: a robin flies across  
The upper corner of the window, you brush your hair away  
And cannot quite see, or a wound will flash  
Against the sweet faces of the others, something like:  
'This is what you wanted to hear, so why  
Did you think of listening to something else? We are all talkers

It is true, but underneath the talk lies  
The moving and not wanting to be moved, the loose  
Meaning, untidy and simple like a threshing floor.

These then were some hazards of the course,  
Yet though we knew the course *was* hazards and nothing else  
It was still a shock when, almost a quarter of a century later,  
The clarity of the rules dawned on you for the first time.  
*They* were the players, and we who had struggled at the game  
Were merely spectators, though subject to its vicissitudes  
And moving with it out of the tearful stadium, borne on shoulders, at last.  
Night after night this message returns, repeated  
In the flickering bulbs of the sky, raised past us, taken away from us,  
Yet ours over and over until the end that is past truth,  
The being of our sentences, in the climate that fostered them,  
Not ours to own, like a book, but to be with, and sometimes  
To be without, alone and desperate.  
But the fantasy makes it ours, a kind of fence-sitting  
Raised to the level of an esthetic ideal. These were moments, years,  
Solid with reality, faces, namable events, kisses, heroic acts,  
But like the friendly beginning of a geometrical progression  
Not too reassuring, as though meaning could be cast aside some day  
When it had been outgrown. Better, you said, to stay cowering  
Like this in the early lessons, since the promise of learning  
Is a delusion, and I agreed, adding that  
Tomorrow would alter the sense of what had already been learned,  
That the learning process is extended in this way, so that from this  
standpoint  
None of us ever graduates from college,  
For time is an emulsion, and probably thinking not to grow up  
Is the brightest kind of maturity for us, right now at any rate.  
And you see, both of us were right, though nothing  
Has somehow come to nothing; the avatars  
Of our conforming to the rules and living

Around the home have made—well, in a sense, “good citizens” of us,  
Brushing the teeth and all that, and learning to accept  
The charity of the hard moments as they are doled out,  
For this is action, this not being sure, this careless  
Preparing, sowing the seeds crooked in the furrow,  
Making ready to forget, and always coming back  
To the mooring of starting out, that day so long ago.

## SUMMER

There is that sound like the wind  
Forgetting in the branches that means something  
Nobody can translate. And there is the sobering "later on,"  
When you consider what a thing meant, and put it down.

For the time being the shadow is ample  
And hardly seen, divided among the twigs of a tree,  
The trees of a forest, just as life is divided up  
Between you and me, and among all the others out there.

And the thinning-out phase follows  
The period of reflection. And suddenly, to be dying  
Is not a little or mean or cheap thing,  
Only wearying, the heat unbearable,

And also the little mindless constructions put upon  
Our fantasies of what we did: summer, the ball of pine needles,  
The loose fates serving our acts, with token smiles,  
Carrying out their instructions too accurately—

Too late to cancel them now—and winter, the twitter  
Of cold stars at the pane, that describes with broad gestures  
This state of being that is not so big after all.  
Summer involves going down as a steep flight of steps

To a narrow ledge over the water. Is this it, then,  
This iron comfort, these reasonable taboos,  
Or did you mean it when you stopped? And the face  
Resembles yours, the one reflected in the water.

## *IT WAS RAINING IN THE CAPITAL*

It was raining in the capital  
And for many days and nights  
The one they called the Aquarian  
Had stayed alone with her delight.

What with the winter and its business  
It had fallen to one side  
And she had only recently picked it up  
Where the other had died.

Between the pages of the newspaper  
It smiled like a face.  
Next to the drugstore on the corner  
It looked to another place.

Or it would just hang around  
Like sullen clouds over the sun.  
But—this was the point—it was real  
To her and to everyone.

For spring had entered the capital  
Walking on gigantic feet.  
The smell of witch hazel indoors  
Changed to narcissus in the street.

She thought she had seen all this before:  
Bundles of new, fresh flowers,  
All changing, pressing upward  
To the distant office towers.

Until now nothing had been easy,  
Hemmed in by all that shit—  
Horseshit, dogshit, birdshit, manshit—  
Yes, she remembered having said it,

Having spoken in that way, thinking  
There could be no road ahead,  
Sobbing into the intractable presence of it  
As one weeps alone in bed.

Its chamber was narrower than a seed  
Yet when the doorbell rang  
It reduced all that living to air  
As "*kyrie eleison*" it sang.

Hearing that music he had once known  
But now forgotten, the man,  
The one who had waited casually in the dark  
Turned to smile at the door's span.

He smiled and shrugged—a lesson  
In the newspaper no longer  
But fed by the ink and paper  
Into a sign of something stronger

Who reads the news and takes the bus  
Going to work each day  
But who was never born of woman  
Nor formed of the earth's clay.

Then what unholy bridegroom  
Did the Aquarian foretell?  
Or was such lively intelligence  
Only the breath of hell?

It scarcely mattered at the moment  
And it shall never matter at all  
Since the moment will not be replaced  
But stand, poised for its fall,

Forever. "This is what my learning  
Teaches," the Aquarian said,  
"To absorb life through the pores  
For the life around you is dead."

The sun came out in the capital  
Just before it set.  
The lovely death's head shone in the sky  
As though these two had never met.

## VARIATIONS, CALYPSO AND FUGUE ON A THEME OF ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

"For the pleasures of the many  
May be oftentimes traced to one  
As the hand that plants an acorn  
Shelters armies from the sun."

And in places where the annual rainfall is .0071 inches  
What a pleasure to lie under the tree, to sit, stand, and get up under  
the tree!

*Im wunderschönen Monat Mai*

The feeling is of never wanting to leave the tree,  
Of predominantly peace and relaxation.  
Do you step out from under the shade a moment,  
It is only to return with renewed expectation, of expectation fulfilled.  
Insecurity be damned! There is something to all this, that will not elude  
us:

Growing up under the shade of friendly trees, with our brothers all  
around.

And truly, young adulthood was never like this:  
Such delight, such consideration, such affirmation in the way the day goes  
round together.

Yes, the world goes round a good deal faster  
When there are highlights on the lips, unspoken and true words in the  
heart,

And the hand keeps brushing away a strand of chestnut hair, only to have  
it fall back into place again.

But all good things must come to an end, and so one must move forward  
Into the space left by one's conclusions. Is this growing old?

Well, it is a good experience, to divest oneself of some tested ideals, some  
old standbys,

And even finding nothing to put in their place is a good experience,  
Preparing one, as it does, for the consternation that is to come.

But—and this is the gist of it—what if I dreamed it all,

The branches, the late afternoon sun,

The trusting camaraderie, the love that watered all,  
Disappearing promptly down into the roots as it should?  
For later in the vast gloom of cities, only there you learn  
How the ideas were good only because they had to die,  
Leaving you alone and skinless, a drawing by Vesalius.  
This is what was meant, and toward which everything directs:  
That the tree should shrivel in 120-degree heat, the acorns  
Lie around on the worn earth like eyeballs, and the lead soldiers shrug and  
slink off.

So my youth was spent, underneath the trees  
I always moved around with perfect ease

I voyaged to Paris at the age of ten  
And met many prominent literary men

Gazing at the Alps was quite a sight  
I felt the tears flow forth with all their might

A climb to the Acropolis meant a lot to me  
I had read the Greek philosophers you see

In the Colosseum I thought my heart would burst  
Thinking of all the victims who had been there first

On Mount Ararat's side I began to grow  
Remembering the Flood there, so long ago

On the banks of the Ganges I stood in mud  
And watched the water light up like blood

The Great Wall of China is really a thrill  
It cleaves through the air like a silver pill

It was built by the hand of man for good or ill  
Showing what he can do when he decides not to kill

But of all the sights that were seen by me  
In the East or West, on land or sea,  
The best was the place that is spelled H-O-M-E.

Now that once again I have achieved home  
I shall forbear all further urge to roam

There is a hole of truth in the green earth's rug  
Once you find it you are as snug as a bug

Maybe some do not like it quite as much as you  
That isn't all you're going to do.

You must remember that it is yours  
Which is why nobody is sending you flowers

This age-old truth I to thee impart  
Act according to the dictates of your art

Because if you don't no one else is going to  
And that person isn't likely to be you.

It is the wind that comes from afar  
It is the truth of the farthest star

In all likelihood you will not need these  
So take it easy and learn your ABC's

And trust in the dream that will never come true  
'Cause that is the scheme that is best for you  
And the gleam that is the most suitable too.

"MAKE MY DREAM COME TRUE." This message, set in 84-point Hobo type, startled in the morning editions of the paper: the old, half-won security troubles the new pause. And with the approach of the holidays, the present is clearly here to stay: the big brass band of its particular moment's consciousness invades the plazas and the narrow alleys. Three-fourths of the houses in this city are on narrow stilts, finer than a girl's wrists; it is largely a question of keeping one's feet dry, and of privacy. In the morning you forget what the punishment was. Probably it was something like eating a pretzel or going into the back yard. Still, you can't tell. These things could be a lot clearer without hurting anybody. But it does not follow that such issues will produce the most dynamic capital gains for you.

Friday. We are really missing you.

"The most suitable," however, was not the one specially asked for nor the one hanging around the lobby. It was just the one asked after, day after day—what spilled over, claimed by the spillway. The distinction of a dog, of how a dog walks. The thought of a dog walking. No one ever referred to the incident again. The case was officially closed. Maybe there were choruses of silent gratitude, welling up in the spring night like a column of cloud, reaching to the very rafters of the sky—but this was their own business. The point is no car ever heard them. Thus, the incident, to call it by one of its names—choice, conduct, absent-minded frown might be others—came to be not only as though it had never happened, but as though it never *could* have happened. Scaled into the wall of all that season's coming on. And thus, for a mere handful of people—roustabouts and degenerates, most of them—it became the only true version. Nothing else mattered. It was bread by morning and night, the dates falling listlessly from the trees—man, woman, child, festering glistening in a single orb. The reply to "hello."

Pink purple and blue  
The way you used to do

The next two days passed oddly for Peter and Christine, and were among the most absorbing they had ever known. On the one hand, a vast open basin—or sea; on the other a narrow spit of land, terminating in a copse, with a few broken-down outbuildings lying here and there. It made no difference that the bey—b-e-y this time, oriental potentate—had ordained their release, there was this funny feeling that they should always be there, sustained by looks out over the ether, missing Mother and Alan and the others but really quiet, in a kind of activity that offers its own way of life, sunflower chained to the sun. Can it ever be resolved? Or are the forms of a person's thoughts controlled by inexorable laws, as in Dürer's Adam and Eve? So mutually exclusive, and so steep—Himalayas jammed side by side like New York apartment buildings. Oh the blame of it, the de-crescendo. My vice is worry. Forget it. The continual splitting up, the ear-shattering volumes of a polar ice-cap breaking up are just what you wanted. You've got it, so shut up.

The crystal haze  
For days and days

Lots of sleep is an important factor, and rubbing the eyes. Getting off the subway he suddenly felt hungry. He went into one place, a place he knew, and ordered a hamburger and a cup of coffee. He hadn't been in this neighborhood in a long time—not since he was a kid. He used to play stickball in the vacant lot across the street. Sometimes his bunch would get into a fight with some of the older boys, and he'd go home tired and bleeding. Most days were the same though. He'd say "Hi" to the other kids and they'd say "Hi" to him. Nice bunch of guys. Finally he decided to take a turn past the old grade school he'd attended as a kid. It was a rambling structure of yellow brick, now gone in seediness and shabbiness which the late-afternoon shadows mercifully softened. The gravel playground in front was choked with weeds. Large trees and shrubbery would do no harm flanking the main entrance. Time farted.

The first shock rattles the cruets in their stand,  
The second rips the door from its hinges.

"My dear friend," he said gently, "you said you were Professor Hertz. You must pardon me if I say that the information startles and mystifies me. When you are stronger I have some questions to ask you, if you will be kind enough to answer them."

No one was prepared for the man's answer to that apparently harmless statement.

Weak as he was, Gustavus Hertz raised himself on his elbow. He stared wildly about him, peering fearfully into the shadowy corners of the room.

"I will tell you nothing! Nothing, do you hear?" he shrieked. "Go away! Go away!"

## SONG

The song tells us of our old way of living,  
Of life in former times. Fragrance of florals,  
How things merely ended when they ended,  
Of beginning again into a sigh. Later

Some movement is reversed and the urgent masks  
Speed toward a totally unexpected end  
Like clocks out of control. Is this the gesture  
That was meant, long ago, the curving in

Of frustrated denials, like jungle foliage  
And the simplicity of the ending all to be let go  
In quick, suffocating sweetness? The day  
Puts toward a nothingness of sky

Its face of rusticated brick. Sooner or later,  
The cars lament, the whole business will be hurled down.  
Meanwhile we sit, scarcely daring to speak,  
To breathe, as though this closeness cost us life.

The pretensions of a past will some day  
Make it over into progress, a growing up,  
As beautiful as a new history book  
With uncut pages, unseen illustrations,

And the purpose of the many stops and starts will be made clear:  
Backing into the old affair of not wanting to grow  
Into the night, which becomes a house, a parting of the ways  
Taking us far into sleep. A dumb love.

## DECOY

We hold these truths to be self-evident:  
That ostracism, both political and moral, has  
Its place in the twentieth-century scheme of things;  
That urban chaos is the problem we have been seeing into and seeing into,  
For the factory, deadpanned by its very existence into a  
Descending code of values, has moved right across the road from total  
financial upheaval  
And caught regression head-on. The descending scale does not imply  
A corresponding deterioration of moral values, punctuated  
By acts of corporate vandalism every five years,  
Like a bunch of violets pinned to a dress, that knows and ignores its own  
standing.  
There is every reason to rejoice with those self-styled prophets of commercial disaster, those harbingers of gloom,  
Over the imminent lateness of the denouement that, advancing slowly,  
never arrives,  
At the same time keeping the door open to a tongue-in-cheek attitude on  
the part of the perpetrators,  
The men who sit down to their vast desks on Monday to begin planning  
the week's notations, jotting memoranda that take  
Invisible form in the air, like flocks of sparrows  
Above the city pavements, turning and wheeling aimlessly  
But on the average directed by discernible motives.

To sum up: We are fond of plotting itineraries  
And our pyramiding memories, alert as dandelion fuzz, dart from one  
pretext to the next  
Seeking in occasions new sources of memories, for memory is profit  
Until the day it spreads out all its accumulation, delta-like, on the plain  
For that day no good can come of remembering, and the anomalies cancel  
each other out.  
But until then foreshortened memories will keep us going, alive, one to the  
other.

There was never any excuse for this and perhaps there need be none,  
For kicking out into the morning, on the wide bed,  
Waking far apart on the bed, the two of them:  
Husband and wife  
Man and wife

## FOR JOHN CLARE

Kind of empty in the way it sees everything, the earth gets to its feet and salutes the sky. More of a success at it this time than most others it is. The feeling that the sky might be in the back of someone's mind. Then there is no telling how many there are. They grace everything—bush and tree—to take the roisterer's mind off his caroling—so it's like a smooth switch back. To what was aired in their previous conniption fit. There is so much to be seen everywhere that it's like not getting used to it, only there is so much it never feels new, never any different. You are standing looking at that building and you cannot take it all in, certain details are already hazy and the mind boggles. What will it all be like in five years' time when you try to remember? Will there have been boards in between the grass part and the edge of the street? As long as that couple is stopping to look in that window over there we cannot go. We feel like they have to tell us we can, but they never look our way and they are already gone, gone far into the future—the night of time. If we could look at a photograph of it and say there they are, they never really stopped but there they are. There is so much to be said, and on the surface of it very little gets said.

There ought to be room for more things, for a spreading out, like. Being immersed in the details of rock and field and slope—letting them come to you for once, and then meeting them halfway would be so much easier—if they took an ingenuous pride in being in one's blood. Alas, we perceive them if at all as those things that were meant to be put aside—costumes of the supporting actors or voice trilling at the end of a narrow enclosed street. You can do nothing with them. Not even offer to pay.

It is possible that finally, like coming to the end of a long, barely perceptible rise, there is mutual cohesion and interaction. The whole scene is fixed in your mind, the music all present, as though you could see each note as well as hear it. I say this because there is an uneasiness in things just now. Waiting for something to be over before you are forced to notice it. The pollarded trees scarcely bucking the wind—and yet it's keen, it makes you fall over. Clabbered sky. Seasons that pass with a rush. After all it's their time too—nothing says they aren't to make something of it. As for Jenny Wren, she cares, hopping about on her little twig like she was tryin' to tell us somethin', but that's just it, she couldn't even if she wanted to—

dumb bird. But the others—and they in some way must know too—it would never occur to them to want to, even if they could take the first step of the terrible journey toward feeling somebody should act, that ends in utter confusion and hopelessness, east of the sun and west of the moon. So their comment is: “No comment.” Meanwhile the whole history of probabilities is coming to life, starting in the upper left-hand corner, like a sail.

## FARM IMPLEMENTS AND RUTABAGAS IN A LANDSCAPE

The first of the undecoded messages read: "Popeye sits in thunder,  
Unthought of. From that shoebox of an apartment,  
From livid curtain's huc, a tangram emerges: a country."  
Meanwhile the Sea Hag was relaxing on a green couch: "How pleasant  
To spend one's vacation *en la casa de Popeye*," she scratched  
Her cleft chin's solitary hair. She remembered spinach

And was going to ask Wimpy if he had bought any spinach.  
"M'love," he intercepted, "the plains are decked out in thunder  
Today, and it shall be as you wish." He scratched  
The part of his head under his hat. The apartment  
Seemed to grow smaller. "But what if no pleasant  
Inspiration plunge us now to the stars? *For this is my country.*"

Suddenly they remembered how it was cheaper in the country.  
Wimpy was thoughtfully cutting open a number 2 can of spinach  
When the door opened and Sweet'pea crept in. "How pleasant!"  
But Sweet'pea looked morose. A note was pinned to his bib. "Thunder  
And tears are unavailing," it read. "Henceforth shall Popeye's apartment  
Be but remembered space, toxic or salubrious, whole or scratched."

Olive came hurtling through the window; its geraniums scratched  
Her long thigh. "I have news!" she gasped. "Popeye, forced as you  
know to flee the country  
One musty gusty evening, by the schemes of his wizened, duplicate  
father, jealous of the apartment  
And all that it contains, myself and spinach  
In particular, heaves bolts of loving thunder  
At his own astonished becoming, rupturing the pleasant

Arpeggio of our years. No more shall pleasant  
Rays of the sun refresh your sense of growing old, nor the scratched  
Tree-trunks and mossy foliage, only immaculate darkness and  
thunder."

She grabbed Sweet'pea. "I'm taking the brat to the country."  
"But you can't do that—he hasn't even finished his spinach,"  
Urged the Sea Hag, looking fearfully around at the apartment.

But Olive was already out of earshot. Now the apartment  
Succumbed to a strange new hush. "Actually it's quite pleasant  
Here," thought the Sea Hag. "If this is all we need fear from spinach  
Then I don't mind so much. Perhaps we could invite Alice the Goon  
over"—she scratched  
One dug pensively—"but Wimpy is such a country  
Bumpkin, always burping like that." Minute at first, the thunder

Soon filled the apartment. It was domestic thunder,  
The color of spinach. Popeye chuckled and scratched  
His balls: it sure was pleasant to spend a day in the country.

## PARERGON

We are happy in our way of life.  
It doesn't make much sense to others. We sit about,  
Read, and are restless. Occasionally it becomes time  
To lower the dark shade over it all.  
Our entity pivots on a self-induced trance  
Like sleep. Noiseless our living stops  
And one strays as in a dream  
Into those respectable purlieus where life is motionless and alive  
To utter the few words one knows:

"O woebegone people! Why so much crying,  
Such desolation in the streets?  
Is it the present of flesh, that each of you  
At your jagged casement window should handle,  
Nervous unto thirst and ultimate death?  
Meanwhile the true way is sleeping;  
Your lawful acts drink an unhealthy repose  
From the upturned lip of this vessel, secretly,  
But it is always time for a change.  
That certain sins of omission go unpunished  
Does not weaken your position  
But this underbrush in which you are secure  
Is its doing. Farewell then,  
Until, under a better sky  
We may meet expended, for just doing it  
Is only an excuse. We need the tether  
Of entering each other's lives, eyes wide apart, crying."

As one who moves forward from a dream  
The stranger left that house on hastening feet  
Leaving behind the woman with the face shaped like an arrowhead,  
And all who gazed upon him wondered at  
The strange activity around him.  
How fast the faces kindled as he passed!

It was a marvel that no one spoke  
To stem the river of his passing  
Now grown to flood proportions, as on the sunlit mall  
Or in the enclosure of some court  
He took his pleasure, savage  
And mild with the contemplating.  
Yet each knew he saw only aspects,  
That the continuity was fierce beyond all dream of enduring,  
And turned his head away, and so  
The lesson eddied far into the night:  
Joyful its beams, and in the blackness blacker still,  
Though undying joyousness, caught in that trap.

## SOME WORDS

*from the French of Arthur Cravan*

Life is not at all what you might think it to be

A simple tale where each thing has its history

It's much more than its scuffle and anything goes

Both evil and good, subject to the same laws.

Each hour has its color and forever gives place

Leaving less than yon bird of itself a trace.

In vain does memory attempt to store away

The scent of its colors in a single bouquet

Memory can but shift cold ashes around

When the depths of time it endeavors to sound.

Never think that you may be allowed, at the end,

To say to yourself, "I am of myself the friend,"

Or make with yourself a last reconciliation.

You will remain the victim of your hesitation

You will forget today before tomorrow is here

And disavow yourself while much is still far from clear.

The defunct days will offer you their images

Only so that you may read of former outrages

And the days to come will mar with their complaints

The splendor that in your honor dejected evening paints.

Wishing to collect in your heart the feelings

Scattered in the meadows of misfortune's hard dealings

You will be the shepherd whose dog has run away

You will know even less whence comes your dismay

Than you know the hour your boredom first saw the light.

Weary of seeking day you will relish the night

In night's dim orchards you will find some rest

The counsels of the trees of night are best

Better than those of the tree of knowledge, which corrupts us at birth

And which you allowed to flourish in the accursed earth.

When your most arduous labors grow pale as death

And you begin to inhale autumn's chilly breath

Winter will come soon to batter with his mace

Your precious moments, scattering them all over the place.

You will always be having to get up from your chairs  
To move on to other heartbreaks, be caught in other snares.

The seasons will revolve on their scented course  
Solar or devastated you will perforce  
Be perfumed at their tepid passing, and not know  
Whether their fragrance brings you joy or woe.

At the moment when your life becomes a total shambles  
You will have to resume your hopeless rambles  
You have left everything behind and you still are eligible  
And all alone, as the gulf becomes unbridgeable  
You will have to earn your daily bread  
Although you feel you'd be better off dead.

They'll hurt you, and you'd like to put up some resistance  
Because you know that your very existence  
Depends on others as unworthy of you  
As you are of God, and when it's time to review  
Your wrongs, you will feel no pain, they will seem a joke  
For you will have ceased to suffer under their yoke.

Whether you pass through fields, towns or across the sea  
You will always retain your melancholy  
And look after it; you will have to think of your career  
Not live it, as in a game where the best player  
Is he who forgets himself, and cannot say  
What spurs him on, and makes him win the day.

When weary henceforth of wishing to gaze  
At the sinuous path of your spread-out days  
You return to the place where your stables used to tower  
You will find nothing left but some fetid manure  
Your steeds beneath other horsemen will have fled  
To autumn's far country, all rusted and red.

Like an ardent rose in the September sun  
You will feel the flesh sag from your limbs, one by one,  
Less of you than of a pruned rosebush will remain,  
That spring lies in wait for, to clothe once again.

If you wish to love you won't know whom to choose  
There are none whose love you'd be sorry to lose  
Not to love at all would be the better part  
Lest another seize and confiscate your heart.

When evening descends on your deserted routes  
You won't be afraid and will say, "What boots  
It to worry and fret? To rail at my luck?  
Since time my actions like an apple will pluck."

You would like of yourself to curtail certain features  
That you dislike, making allowances for this creature,  
Giving that other one a chance to show his fettle,  
Confining yet another behind bars of metal:  
That rebel will soon become an armèd titan.

Then let yourself love all that you take delight in  
Accept yourself whole, accept the heritage  
That shaped you and is passed on from age to age  
Down to your entity. Remain mysterious;  
Rather than be pure, accept yourself as numerous.  
The wave of heredity will not be denied:  
Best, then, on a lover's silken breast to abide  
And be wafted by her to Nirvana's blue shoals  
Where the self is abolished and renounces its goals.

In you all things must live and procreate  
Forget about the harvest and its sheaves of wheat  
You are the harvest and not the reaper  
And of your domain another is the keeper.

When you see the lapsed dreams that childhood invents  
Salute your adolescence and fold their tents  
Virginal, tall and slim beside the jasmine tree  
An adorable girl is plaiting tenderly  
The bouquet of love, which will stick in your memory  
As the final vision and the final story.

Henceforth you will burn with lascivious fire

Accursèd passion will strum its lyre  
At the charming crossroads where day is on the wane  
As the curve of a hill dissolves in a plain.

The tacit beauty of the sacred plateau  
Will be spoiled for you and you will never know  
Henceforth the peace a pious heart bestows  
To the soul its gentle sister in whom it echoes;  
Anxiety will have called everything into question  
And you will be tempted to the wildest actions.

Then let all fade at the edge of our days!  
No God emerges to dream our destinies.  
The days depart, only boredom does not retreat  
It's like a path that flies beneath one's feet  
Whose horizon shifts while as we trudge  
The dust and mud stick to us and do not budge.

In vain do we speak, provoke actions or think,  
We are prisoners of the world's demented sink.

The soft enchantments of our years of innocence  
Are harvested by accredited experience  
Our fondest memories soon turn to poison  
And only oblivion remains in season.

When, beside a window, one feels evening prevail  
Who is there who can receive its slanting veil  
And not regret day that bore it on its stream  
Whether day was joy or under evil's regime  
Drawing us to the one and deploring the other  
Regretting the departure of all our brothers  
And all that made the day, including its stains.

Whoever you may be O man who complains  
Not at your destiny, can you then doubt,  
When the moment arrives for you to stretch out,  
That remorse, a stinking jackal with subtle nose,  
Will come at the end to devour your repose?

... Something gentle and something sad effsoons

In the flanks of our pale and realistic noons  
Holds with our soul a discourse without end  
The curtain rises on the afternoon wind  
Day sheds its leaves and now will soon be gone  
And already my adulthood seems to mourn  
Beside the reddish sunsets of the hollow vase  
As gently it starts to deepen and slowly to increase.

## THE BUNGALOWS

Impatient as we were for all of them to join us,  
The land had not yet risen into view: gulls had swept the gray steel  
towers away  
So that it profited less to go searching, away over the humming earth  
Than to stay in immediate relation to these other things—boxes, store  
parts, whatever you wanted to call them—  
Whose installedness was the price of further revolutions, so you knew  
this combat was the last.  
And still the relationship waxed, billowed like scenery on the breeze.

They are the same aren't they,  
The presumed landscape and the dream of home  
Because the people are all homesick today or desperately sleeping,  
Trying to remember how those rectangular shapes  
Became so extraneous and so near  
To create a foreground of quiet knowledge  
In which youth had grown old, chanting and singing wise hymns that  
Will sign for old age  
And so lift up the past to be persuaded, and be put down again.

The warning is nothing more than an aspirate "h";  
The problem is sketched completely, like fireworks mounted on poles:  
Complexion of evening, the accurate voices of the others.  
During Coca-Cola lessons it becomes patent  
Of noise on the left, and we had so skipped a stage that  
The great wave of the past, compounded in derision,  
Submerged idea and non-dreamer alike  
In falsetto starlight like "purity"  
Of design that had been the first danger sign  
To wash the sticky, icky stuff down the drain—pfui!

How does it feel to be outside and inside at the same time,  
The delicious feeling of the air contradicting and secretly abetting

The interior warmth? But land curdles the dismay in which it's written  
Bearing to a final point of folly and doom  
The wisdom of these generations.  
Look at what you've done to the landscape—  
The ice cube, the olive—  
There is a perfect tri-city mesh of things  
Extending all the way along the river on both sides  
With the end left for thoughts on construction  
That are always turning to alps and thresholds  
Above the tide of others, feeding a European moss rose without glory.

We shall very soon have the pleasure of recording  
A period of unanimous tergiversation in this respect  
And to make that pleasure the greater, it is worth while  
At the risk of tedious iteration, to put first upon record a final protest:  
Rather decaying art, genius, inspiration to hold to  
An impossible "calque" of reality, than  
"The new school of the trivial, rising up on the field of battle,  
A thing of sludge and leaf-mold," and life  
Goes trickling out through the holes, like water through a sieve,  
All in one direction.

You who were directionless, and thought it would solve everything if  
you found one,  
What do you make of this? Just because a thing is immortal  
Is that any reason to worship it? Death, after all, is immortal.  
But you have gone into your houses and shut the doors, meaning  
There can be no further discussion.  
And the river pursues its lonely course  
With the sky and the trees cast up from the landscape  
For green brings unhappiness—*le vert porte malheur*.  
"The chartreuse mountain on the absinthe plain  
Makes the strong man's tears tumble down like rain."

All this came to pass eons ago.  
Your program worked out perfectly. You even avoided  
The monotony of perfection by leaving in certain flaws:  
A backward way of becoming, a forced handshake,  
An absent-minded smile, though in fact nothing was left to chance.  
Each detail was startlingly clear, as though seen through a magnifying  
glass,  
Or would have been to an ideal observer, namely yourself—  
For only you could watch yourself so patiently from afar  
The way God watches a sinner on the path to redemption,  
Sometimes disappearing into valleys, but always *on the way*,  
For it all builds up into something, meaningless or meaningful  
As architecture, because planned and then abandoned when completed,  
To live afterwards, in sunlight and shadow, a certain amount of years.  
Who cares about what was there before? There is no going back,  
For standing still means death, and life is moving on,  
Moving on towards death. But sometimes standing still is also life.

## *THE CHATEAU HARDWARE*

It was always November there. The farms  
Were a kind of precinct; a certain control  
Had been exercised. The little birds  
Used to collect along the fence.  
It was the great "as though," the how the day went,  
The excursions of the police  
As I pursued my bodily functions, wanting  
Neither fire nor water,  
Vibrating to the distant pinch  
And turning out the way I am, turning out to greet you.

## *Sortes Vergilianae*

You have been living now for a long time and there is nothing you do not know.

Perhaps something you read in the newspaper influenced you and that was very frequently.

They have left you to think along these lines and you have gone your own way because you guessed that

Under their hiding was the secret, casual as breath, betrayed for the asking. Then the sky opened up, revealing much more than any of you were intended to know.

It is a strange thing how fast the growth is, almost as fast as the light from polar regions

Reflected off the arctic ice-cap in summer. When you know where it is heading

You have to follow it, though at a sadly reduced rate of speed,

Hence folly and idleness, raging at the confines of some miserable sunlit alley or court.

It is the nature of these people to embrace each other, they know no other kind but themselves.

Things pass quickly out of sight and the best is to be forgotten quickly

For it is wretchedness that endures, shedding its cancerous light on all it approaches:

Words spoken in the heat of passion, that might have been retracted in good time,

All good intentions, all that was arguable. These are stilled now, as the embrace in the hollow of its flux

And can never be revived except as perverse notations on an indisputable state of things,

As conduct in the past, vanished from the reckoning long before it was time.

Lately you've found the dull fevers still inflict their round, only they are unassimilable

Now that newness or importance has worn away. It is with us like day and night,

The surge upward through the grade-school positioning and bursting into  
soft gray blooms  
Like vacuum-cleaner sweepings, the opulent fuzz of our cage, or like an  
excited insect  
In nervous scrimmage for the head, etching its none-too-complex ordi-  
nances into the matter of the day.  
Presently all will go off satisfied, leaving the millpond bare, a site for new  
picnics,  
As they came, naked, to explore all the possible grounds on which ex-  
changes could be set up.  
It is "No Fishing" in modest capital letters, and getting out from under the  
major weight of the thing  
As it was being indoctrinated and dropped, heavy as a branch with apples,  
And as it started to sigh, just before tumbling into your lap, chagrined and  
satisfied at the same time,  
Knowing its day over and your patience only beginning, toward what  
marvels of speculation, auscultation, world-view,  
Satisfied with the entourage. It is this blank carcass of whims and tentative  
afterthoughts  
Which is being delivered into your hand like a letter some forty-odd years  
after the day it was posted.  
Strange, isn't it, that the message makes some sense, if only a relative one  
in the larger context of message-receiving  
That you will be called to account for just as the purpose of it is becoming  
plain,  
Being one and the same with the day it set out, though you cannot imagine  
this.  
There was a time when the words dug in, and you laughed and joked,  
accomplice  
Of all the possibilities of their journey through the night and the stars,  
creature  
Who looked to the abandonment of such archaic forms as these, and mean-  
while

Supported them as the tools that made you. The rut became apparent only  
later  
And by then it was too late to check such expansive aspects as what to do  
while waiting  
For the others to show: unfortunately no pile of tattered magazines was in  
evidence,  
Such dramas sleeping below the surface of the everyday machinery; besides  
Quality is not given to everybody, and who are you to have been supposing  
you had it?  
So the journey grew ever slower; the battlements of the city could now be  
discerned from afar  
But meanwhile the water was giving out and malaria had decimated their  
ranks and undermined their morale,  
You know the story, so that if turning back was unthinkable, so was  
victorious conquest of the great brazen gates.  
Best perhaps to fold up right here, but even that was not to be granted.  
Some days later in the pulsating of orchestras someone asked for a drink:  
The music stopped and those who had been confidently counting the  
rhythms grew pale.  
This is just a footnote, though a microcosmic one perhaps, to the greater  
curve  
Of the elaboration; it asks no place in it, only insertion *hors-texte* as the  
invisible notion of how that day grew  
From planisphere to heaven, and what part in it all the "I" had, the  
insatiable researcher of learned trivia, bookworm,  
And one who marched along with, "made common cause," yet had neither  
the gumption nor the desire to trick the thing into happening,  
Only long patience, as the star climbs and sinks, leaving illumination to the  
setting sun.

From  
*THREE*  
*POEMS*



## THE SYSTEM

The system was breaking down. The one who had wandered alone past so many happenings and events began to feel, backing up along the primal vein that led to his center, the beginning of a hiccup that would, if left to gather, explode the center to the extremities of life, the suburbs through which one makes one's way to where the country is.

At this time of life whatever being there is is doing a lot of listening, as though to the feeling of the wind before it starts, and it slides down this anticipation of itself, already full-fledged, a lightning existence that has come into our own. The trees and the streets are there merely to divide it up, to prevent it from getting all over itself, from retreating into itself instead of logically unshuffling into this morning that had to be, of the day of temptation. It is with some playfulness that we actually sit down to the business of mastering the many pauses and the abrupt, sharp accretions of regular being in the clotted sphere of today's activities. As though this were just any old day. There is no need for setting out, to advertise one's destination. All the facts are here and it remains only to use them in the right combinations, but that building will be the size of today, the rooms habitable and leading into one another in a lasting sequence, eternal and of the greatest timeliness.

It is all that. But there was time for others, that were to have got under way, sequences that now can exist only in memory, for there were other times for them. Yet they really existed. For instance a jagged kind of mood that comes at the end of the day, lifting life into the truth of real pain for a few moments before subsiding in the usual irregular way, as things do. These were as much there as anything, things to be fumbled with, cringed before: dry churrings of no timbre, hysterical staccato passages that one cannot master or turn away from. These things led into life. Now they are gone but it remains, calm, lucid, but weightless, drifting above everything and everybody like a light in the sky, no more to be surmised, only remembered as so many things that remain at equal distances from us are

remembered. The light drinks the dark and sinks down, not on top of us as we had expected but far, far from us in some other, unrelated sphere. This was not even the life that was going to happen to us. It was different in those days, though. Men felt things differently and their reactions were different. It was all life, this truth, you forgot about it and it was there. No need to collect your thoughts at every moment before putting forth a hesitant feeler into the rank and file of their sensations: the truth was obstinately itself, so much so that it always seemed about to harden and shrink, to grow hard and dark and vanish into itself anxiously but stubbornly, but this was just the other side of the coin of its intense conviction. It really knew what it *was*. Meanwhile the life uncurled around it in calm waves, unimpressed by the severity and yet not paying much mind, also very much itself. It seemed as though innumerable transparent tissues hovered around these two entities and joined them in some way, and yet when one looked there was nothing special to be seen, only miles and miles of buoyancy, the way the mild blue sky of a summer afternoon seems to support a distant soaring bird. This was the outside reality. Inside there was like a bare room, or an alphabet, an alphabet of clemency. Now at last you knew what you were supposed to know. The words formed from it and the sentences formed from them were dry and clear, as though made of wood. There wasn't too much of any one thing. The feelings never wandered off into a private song or tried to present the procession of straightforward facts as something like a pageant: the gorgeous was still unknown. There was, however, a residue, a kind of fiction that developed parallel to the classic truths of daily life (as it was in that heroic but commonplace age) as they unfolded with the foreseeable majesty of a holocaust, an unfrightening one, and went unrecognized, drawing force and grandeur from this like the illegitimate offspring of a king. It is this "other tradition" which we propose to explore. The facts of history have been too well rehearsed (I'm speaking needless to say not of written history but the oral kind that goes on in you without your having to do anything about it) to require further elucidation here. But the other, unrelated happenings that form a kind of sequence of fantastic reflections as they succeed each other at a pace and according to an inner necessity of their own—these, I say, have hardly ever

been looked at from a vantage point other than the historian's and an arcane historian's at that. The living aspect of these obscure phenomena has never to my knowledge been examined from a point of view like the painter's: in the round, bathed in a sufficient flow of overhead light, with "all its imperfections on its head" and yet without prejudice of the exaggerations either of the anathematist or the eulogist: quietly, in short, and I hope succinctly. Judged from this angle the whole affair will, I think, partake of and benefit from the enthusiasm not of the religious fanatic but of the average, open-minded, intelligent person who has never interested himself before in these matters either from not having had the leisure to do so or from ignorance of their existence.

From the outset it was apparent that someone had played a colossal trick on something. The switches had been tripped, as it were; the entire world or one's limited but accurate idea of it was bathed in glowing love, of a sort that need never have come into being but was now indispensable as air is to living creatures. It filled up the whole universe, raising the temperature of all things. Not an atom but did not feel obscurely compelled to set out in search of a mate; not a living creature, no insect or rodent, that didn't feel the obscure twitchings of dormant love, that didn't ache to join in the universal turmoil and hullabaloo that fell over the earth, roiling the clear waters of the reflective intellect, getting it into all kinds of messes that could have been avoided if only, as Pascal says, we had the sense to stay in our room, but the individual will condemns this notion and sallies forth full of ardor and *hubris*, bent on self-discovery in the guise of an attractive partner who is *the* heaven-sent one, the convex one with whom he has had the urge to mate all these seasons without realizing it. Thus a state of positively sinful disquiet began to prevail wherein men's eyes could be averted from the truth by the passing of a romantic stranger whose perfume set in motion all kinds of idle and frivolous trains of thought leading who knows where—to hell, most likely, or at very best to a position of blankness and ill-conceived repose on the edge of the flood, so that looking down into it one no longer saw the comforting reflection of one's own face

and felt secure in the knowledge that, whatever the outcome, the struggle was going on in the arena of one's own breast. The bases for true reflective thinking had been annihilated by the scourge, and at the same time there was the undeniable fact of exaltation on many fronts, of a sense of holiness growing up through the many kinds of passion like a tree with branches bearing candelabra higher and higher up until they almost vanish from sight and are confused with the stars whose earthly avatars they are: the celestial promise of delights to come in another world and still lovely to look at in this one. Thus, in a half-baked kind of way, this cosmic welter of attractions was coming to stand for the real thing, which has to be colorless and featureless if it is to be the true reflection of the primeval energy from which it issued forth, once a salient force capable of assuming the shape of any of the great impulses struggling to accomplish the universal task, but now bogged down in a single aspect of these to the detriment of the others, which begin to dwindle, jejeune, etiolated, as though not really essential, as though someone had devised them for the mere pleasure of complicating the already complicated texture of the byways and torments through which we have to stray, plagued by thorns, chased by wild beasts, as though it were not commonly known from the beginning that not one of these tendrils of the tree of humanity could be bruised without endangering the whole vast waving mass; that that gorgeous, motley organism would tumble or die out unless each particle of its well-being were conserved as precious as the idea of the whole. For universal love is as special an aspect as carnal love or any of the other kinds: all forms of mental and spiritual activity must be practiced and encouraged equally if the whole affair is to prosper. There is no cutting corners where the life of the soul is concerned, even if a too modest approximation of the wish that caused it to begin to want to flower be the result—a result that could look like overpruning to the untrained eye. Thus it was that a kind of blight fell on these early forms of going forth and being together, an anarchy of the affections sprung from too much universal cohesion. Yet so blind are we to the true nature of reality at any given moment that this chaos—bathed, it is true, in the iridescent hues of the rainbow and clothed in an endless confusion of fair and variegated forms which did their best to stifle any burgeoning notions

of the formlessness of the whole, the muddle really as ugly as sin, which at every moment shone through the colored masses, bringing a telltale finger squarely down on the addition line, beneath which these self-important and self-convoluted shapes added disconcertingly up to zero—this chaos began to seem like the normal way of being, so that some time later even very sensitive and perceptive souls had been taken in: it was for them life's rolling river, with its calm eddies and shallows as well as its more swiftly moving parts and ahead of these the rapids, with an awful roar somewhere in the distance; and yet, or so it seemed to these more sensible than average folk, a certain amount of hardship has to be accepted if we want the river-journey to continue; life cannot be a series of totally pleasant events, and we must accept the bad if we also wish the good; indeed a certain amount of evil is necessary to set it in the proper relief: how could we know the good without some experience of its opposite? And so these souls took over and dictated to the obscurer masses that follow in the wake of the discoverers. The way was picturesque and even came to seem carefully thought out; controls were waiting, in case things got out of hand, to restore the inevitable balance of happiness and woe; meanwhile the latter kept gradually diminishing whenever its turn came round and one really felt that one had set one's foot on the upward path, the spiral leading from the motley darkened and lightened landscape here below to the transparent veils of heaven. All that was necessary were patience and humbleness in recognizing one's errors, so as to be sure of starting out from the right place the next time, and so a sense of steady advancement came to reward one's efforts each time it seemed that one had been traveling too long without a view of the sun. And even in darkest night this sense of advancement came to whisper at one's side like a fellow traveler pointing the way.

Things had endured this way for some time, so that it began to seem as though some permanent way of life had installed itself, a stability immune to the fluctuations of other eras: the pendulum that throughout eternity has swung successively toward joy and grief had been stilled by a magic hand. Thus for the first time it seemed possible to consider ways toward a more

fruitful and harmonious manner of living, without the fear of an adverse fate's coming to reduce one's efforts to nothing so soon as undertaken. And yet it seemed to those living as though even this state had endured for a considerable length of time. No one had anything against it, and most reveled in the creative possibilities its freedom offered, yet to all it seemed as though a major development had been holding off for quite a while and that its effects were on the verge of being felt, if only the present could give a slight push into the haphazard field of potentiality that lay stretched all around like a meadow full of wild flowers whose delightful promise lies so apparent that all question of entry into it and enjoyment is suspended for the moment. Hence certain younger spectators felt that all had already come to an end, that the progress toward infinity had crystallized in them, that they in fact were the other they had been awaiting, and that any look outward over the mild shoals of possibilities that lay strewn about as far as the eye could see was as gazing into a mirror reflecting the innermost depths of the soul.

Who has seen the wind? Yet it was precisely this that these enterprising but deluded young people were asking themselves. They were correct in assuming that the whole question of behavior in life has to be rethought each second; that not a breath can be drawn nor a footstep taken without our being forced in some way to reassess the age-old problem of what we are to do here and how did we get here, taking into account our relations with those about us and with ourselves, and the ever-present issue of our eternal salvation, which looms larger at every moment—even when forgotten it seems to grow like the outline of a mountain as one approaches it. To be always conscious of these multiple facets is to incarnate a dimensionless organism like the wind's, a living concern that can know no rest, by definition: it *is* restlessness. But this condition of eternal vigilance had been accepted with the understanding that somehow it would also mirror the peace that all awaited so impatiently: it could not proceed unless the generalized shape of this nirvana-like state could impose its form on the continually active atoms of the moving forward which was the price it exacted;

hence a dilemma for any but the unrepentant hedonists or on the contrary those who chose to remain all day on the dung-heap, rending their hair and clothing and speaking of sackcloth and ashes: these, by far the noisiest group, made the least impression as usual, yet the very fact that they existed pointed to what seemed to be a tragic flaw in the system's structure; for among penance or perpetual feasting or the draconian requirements of a conscience eternally mobilized against itself, feeding on itself in order to recreate itself in a shape that the next instant would destroy, how was one to choose? So that those who assumed that they had reached the end of an elaborate but basically simple progression, the logical last step of history, came more and more to be the dominant party: a motley group but with many level heads among them, whose voices chanting the wise maxims of regular power gradually approached the point of submerging the other cacophony of tinkling cymbals and wailing and individual voices raised in solemn but unreal debate. This was the logical cutting-off place, then: ahead might lie new forms of life, some of them beautiful perhaps, but the point was that the effort of establishing them or anything else that was to come had ended here: a permanent now had taken over and was free to recast the old forms, riddles that had been expected to last until the Day of Judgment, as it saw fit, in whatever shape seemed expedient for living the next few crucial moments into a future without controls.

It seemed, just for a moment, that a new point had now been reached. It was not the time for digressions yet it made them inevitable, like a curtain at the end of an act. It brought you to a pass where turning back was unthinkable, and where further progress was possible only after it had been discussed at length, but which also outlawed discussion. Life became a pregnant silence, but it was understood that the silence was to lead nowhere. It became impossible to breathe easily in this constricted atmosphere. We ate little, for it seemed that in this way we could produce the inner emptiness from which alone understanding can spring up, the tree of contradictions, joyous and living, investing that hollow void with its complicated material self. At this time we were surrounded by old things, such

as need not be questioned but which distill the meek information that is within them like a perfume on the air, to be used and disposed of; and also by certain new things which wear their newness like a quality, perhaps as an endorsement of the present, in all events as a vote of confidence in the currency of the just-created as a common language available to all men of good will, however disturbing the times themselves might turn out to be. Gradually one grew less aware of the idea of not turning back imposed as a condition for progress, as one imbibed the magic present that drew everything—the old and the new—along in the net of its infectious charm. Surely it would be possible to profit from the options of this cooperative new climate as though they were a charter instead of a vague sense of well-being, like a mild day in early spring, ready to be dashed to pieces by the first seasonable drop in temperature. And meanwhile there was a great sense of each one's going about his business, quiet in the elation of that accomplishment, as though it were enough to set one's foot on a certain path to be guaranteed of arriving at some destination. Yet the destinations were few. What actually was *wanted* from this constructive feeling? A "house by the side of the road" in which one could stay indefinitely, arranging new opportunities and fixing up old ones so that they mingled in a harmonious mass that could be called living with a sense of purpose? No, what was wanted and was precisely lacking in this gay and salubrious desert was an end to the "end" theory whereby each man was both an idol and the humblest of idolaters, in other words the antipodes of his own universe, his own redemption or his own damnation, with the rest of the world as a painted backdrop to his own monodrama of becoming of which he was the lone impassioned spectator. But the world avenges itself on those who would lose it by skipping over the due process of elimination, from whatever altruistic motive, by incrusting itself so thoroughly in these efforts at self-renewal that no amount of wriggling can dislodge its positive or negative image from all that is contemplated of present potentialities or the great sane simplifications to come. So that it was all lost, or rather all in the shade that instills weariness and sickness into the limbs under the guise of enraptured satiety. There was, again, no place to go, that is, no place that would not make a mockery of the place already left, casting all prog-

ress forward into the confusion of an eternally misapplied present. This was the stage to which reason and intuition working so well together had brought us, but it was scarcely their fault if now fear at the longest shadows of approaching darkness began to prompt thoughts of stopping somewhere for the night, as well as a serious doubt that any such place existed on the face of the earth.

On this Sunday which is also the last day of January let us pause for a moment to take note of where we are. A new year has just begun and now a new month is coming up, charged with its weight of promise and probable disappointments, standing in the wings like an actor who is conscious of nothing but the anticipated cue, totally absorbed, a pillar of waiting. And now there is no help for it but to be cast adrift in the new month. One is plucked from one month to the next; the year is like a fast-moving Ferris wheel; tomorrow all the riders will be under the sign of February and there is no appeal, one will have to get used to living with its qualities and perhaps one will even adjust to them successfully before the next month arrives with a whole string of new implications in its wake. Just to live this way is impossibly difficult, but the strange thing is that no one seems to notice it; people sail along quite comfortably and actually seem to enjoy the way the year progresses, and they manage to fill its widening space with multiple activities which apparently mean a lot to them. Of course some are sadder than the others but it doesn't seem to be because of the dictatorship of the months and years, and it goes away after a while. But the few who want order in their lives and a sense of growing and progression toward a fixed end suffer terribly. Sometimes they try to dope their consciousness of the shifting but ineluctable grid of time that has been arbitrarily imposed on them with alcohol or drugs, but these lead merely to mornings after whose waking is ten times more painful than before, bringing with it a new and more terrible realization of the impossibility of reconciling their own ends with those of the cosmos. If by chance you should be diverted or distracted for a moment from awareness of your imprisonment by some pleasant or interesting occurrence, there is always the shape of the

individual day to remind you. It is a microcosm of man's life as it gently wanes, its long morning shadows getting shorter with the approach of noon, the high point of the day which could be likened to that sudden tremendous moment of intuition that comes only once in a lifetime, and then the fuller, more rounded shapes of early afternoon as the sun imperceptibly sinks in the sky and the shadows start to lengthen, until all are blotted in the stealthy coming of twilight, merciful in one sense that it hides the differences, blemishes as well as beauty marks, that gave the day its character and in so doing caused it to be another day in our limited span of days, the reminder that time is moving on and we are getting older, not older enough to make any difference on this particular occasion, but older all the same. Even now the sun is dropping below the horizon; a few moments ago it was still light enough to read but now it is no more, the printed characters swarm over the page to create an impressionistic blur. Soon the page itself will be invisible. Yet one has no urge to get up and put on a light; it is enough to be sitting here, grateful for the reminder that yet another day has come and gone, and you have done nothing about it. What about the morning resolutions to convert all the confused details in the air about you into a column of intelligible figures? To draw up a balance sheet? This naturally went undone, and you are perhaps grateful also for your laziness, glad that it has brought you to this pass where you must now face up to the day's inexorable end as indeed we must all face up to death some day, and put our faith in some superior power which will carry us beyond into a region of light and timelessness. Even if we had done the things we ought to have done it probably wouldn't have mattered anyway as everyone always leaves something undone and this can be just as ruinous as a whole life of crime or dissipation. Yes, in the long run there is something to be said for these shiftless days, each distilling its drop of poison until the cup is full; there is something to be said for them because there is no escaping them.

On the streets, in private places, they have no idea of the importance of these things. This exists only in our own minds, that is not in any place,

nowhere. Possibly then it does not exist. Even its details are hazardous to consider. Most people would not consider it in its details, because (a) they would argue that details, no matter how complete, can give no adequate idea of the whole, and (b), because the details can too easily become fetishes, i.e., become prized for themselves, with no notion of the whole of which they were a part, with only an idolatrous understanding of the qualities of the particular detail. Certainly even this limited understanding can lead to a conception of beauty, insofar as any detail is a microcosm of the whole, as is so often the case. Thus you find people whose perfect understanding of love is deduced from lust, as the description of a flower can generate an idea of what it looks like. It is even possible that this irregular but satisfying understanding is the only one really allotted to us; that knowledge of the whole is impossible or at least so impractical as to be rarely or never feasible; that as we are born among imperfections we are indeed obligated to use them toward an assimilation of the imperfections that we are and the greater ones that we are to become; that not to do so would be to sin against nature, that is to end up with nothing, not even the reassuring knowledge that we have sinned to some purpose, but are instead empty and blameless as an inanimate object. Yet we know not what we are to become, therefore we can never completely rule out the possibility of intellectual understanding, even though it seems nothing but a snare and a delusion; we might miss out on everything by ignoring its call to order, which is in fact audible to each of us; therefore how can we decide? It is no solution either to combine the two approaches, to borrow from right reason or sensory data as the case seems to warrant, for an amalgam is not completeness either, and indeed is far less likely to be so through an error in dosage. So of the three methods: reason, sense, or a knowing combination of both, the last seems the least like a winner, the second problematic; only the first has some slim chance of succeeding through sheer perversity, which is possibly the only way to succeed at all. Thus we may be spared at least the agonizing wading through a slew of details of theories of action at the risk of getting hopelessly bogged down in them: better the erratic approach, which wins all or at least loses nothing, than the cautious semi-failure; better Don Quixote and his windmills than all the Sancho Panzas in

the world; and may it not eventually turn out that to risk all is to win all, even at the expense of intimate, visceral knowledge of the truth, of its graininess and contours, even though this approach leads despite its physicality to no practical understanding of the truth, no grasp of how to use it toward ends it never dreams of? This, then, is surely the way; but discovery of where it begins is another matter.

The great careers are like that: a slow burst that narrows to a final release, pointed but not acute, a life of suffering redeemed and annihilated at the end, and for what? For a casual moment of knowing that is here one minute and gone the next, almost before you were aware of it? Whole tribes of seekers of phenomena who mattered very much to themselves have gone up in smoke in the space of a few seconds, with less fuss than a shooting star. Is it then that our bodies combined in such a way as to show others that we really mean it to each other—is this really all we ever intended to do? Having been born with knowledge or at least with the capacity to judge, to spend all our time working toward a way to show off that knowledge, so as to be able to return to it at the end for what it is? Besides the obvious question of who knows whether it will still be there, there is the even more urgent one of whose life are we taking into our hands? Is there no way in which these things may be done for themselves, so that others may enjoy them? Already we have wandered far from the track and, as always happens in such cases, darkness has fallen and it would be impossible to find one's way back without getting lost. Is this a reason to stay where we are, on the false assumption that we are less lost right here, and thus to complete the cycle of inertia that we began wrongly supposing that it would lead to knowledge? No, it is far better to continue on our way, even at the risk of getting more lost (an impossibility, of course). We might at least wind up with a knowledge of who *they* are, with whom we began, and at the very least with a new respect toward the others, reached through a more perfect understanding of ourselves and the true way. But still the "career" notion intervenes. It is impossible for us at the present time not to think of these people as separate entities, each with his development and

aim to be achieved, careers which will "peak" after a while and then go back to being ordinary lives that fade quite naturally into air as they are used up, and are as though they never were, except for the "lesson" which has added an iota to the sum of all human understanding. And this way of speaking has trapped each one of us.

An alternative way would be the "life-as-ritual" concept. According to this theory no looking back is possible, in itself a considerable advantage, and the stages of the ritual are each considered in themselves, for themselves, but here no danger of fetishism is possible because all contact with the past has been severed. Fetishism comes into being only when there is a past that may seem more or less attractive when compared with the present; the resulting inequality causes a rush toward the immediate object of contemplation, hardens it into a husk around its own being, which promptly ceases. But the ritual approach provides some bad moments too. All its links severed with the worldly matrix from which it sprang, the soul feels that it is propelling itself forward at an ever-increasing speed. This very speed becomes a source of intoxication and of more gradually accruing speed; in the end the soul cannot recognize itself and is as one lost, though it imagines it has found eternal rest. But the true harmony which would render this peace interesting is lacking. There is only a cold knowledge of goodness and nakedness radiating out in every direction like the spines of the horse chestnut; mere knowledge and experience without the visual irregularities, those celestial motes in the eye that alone can transform ecstasy into a particular state beyond the dearly won generality. Here again, if backward looks were possible, not nostalgia but a series of carefully selected views, hieratic as icons, the difficulty would be eased and self could merge with selflessness, in a true appreciation of the tremendous volumes of eternity. But this is impossible because the ritual is by definition something impersonal, and can only move further in that direction. It was born without a knowledge of the past. And any attempt to hybridize it can only result in destruction and even death.

In addition to these twin notions of growth, two kinds of happiness are possible: the frontal and the latent. The first occurs naturally throughout life; it is experienced as a kind of sense of immediacy, even urgency; often we first become aware of it at a moment when we feel we need outside help. Its sudden balm suffuses the soul without warning, as a kind of bloom or grace. We suppose that souls "in glory" feel this way permanently, as a day-to-day condition of being: yes, as a condition, for it is both more and less than a state; it exacts certain prerequisites and then it builds on these, but the foundation is never forgotten; it is the foundation that is happiness. And as it exacts, so it bestows. There is not the mindlessness, no idea of eternal lassitude permeated with the light of the firmament or whatever; there are only the value judgments of truth, exposed one after another like colored slides on the white wall that is the naked soul, or a kind of hard glaze that definitively transforms the ordinary clay of the soul into an object of beauty by obliterating the knowledge of what lies underneath. This is what we are all hoping for, yet we know that very few among us will ever achieve it; those who do will succeed less through their own efforts than through the obscure workings of grace as chance, so that although we would be very glad to have the experience of this sudden opening up, this inundation which shall last an eternity, we do not bother our heads too much about it, so distant and far away it seems, like those beautiful mosaic ceilings representing heaven which we crane up at from below, knowing that we cannot get near enough for it to be legible but liking all the same the vastness and aura of the conception, glad to have seen it and to know it's there but nevertheless firmly passing outward into the sunlight after two or three turns around the majestic dim interior. This kind of beauty is almost too abstract to be experienced as beauty, and yet we must realize that it is not an abstract notion, that it really can happen at times and that life at these times seems marvelous. Indeed this is truly what we were brought into creation for, if not to experience it, at least to have the knowledge of it as an ideal toward which the whole universe tends and which therefore confers a shape on the random movements outside us—these are all straining in the same direction, toward the same goal, though it is certain that few if any of those we see now will attain it.

The second kind, the latent or dormant kind, is harder to understand. We all know those periods of balmy weather in early spring, sometimes even before spring has officially begun: days or even a few hours when the air seems suffused with an unearthly tenderness, as though love were about to start, now, at this moment, on an endless journey put off since the beginning of time. Just to walk a few steps in this romantic atmosphere is to experience a magical but quiescent bliss, as though the torch of life were about to be placed in one's hands: after having anticipated it for so long, what is one now to do? And so the happiness withholds itself, perhaps even indefinitely; it realizes that the vessel has not yet been fully prepared to receive it; it is afraid it will destroy the order of things by precipitating itself too soon. But this in turn quickens the dismay of the vessel or recipient; it, or we, have been waiting all our lives for this sign of fulfillment, now to be abruptly snatched away so soon as barely perceived. And a kind of panic develops, which for many becomes a permanent state of being, with all the appearances of a calm, purposeful, reflective life. These people are awaiting the sign of their felicity without hope; its *nearness* is there, tingeing the air around them, in suspension, in escrow as it were, but they cannot get at it. Yet so great is their eagerness that they believe that they have already absorbed it, that they have attained that plane of final realization which we are all striving for, that they have achieved a state of permanent grace. Hence the air of joyful resignation, the beatific upturned eyelids, the paralyzed stance of these castaways of the eternal voyage, who imagine they have reached the promised land when in reality the ship is sinking under them. The great fright has turned their gaze upward, to the stars, to the heavens; they see nothing of the disarray around them, their ears are closed to the cries of their fellow passengers; they can think only of themselves when all the time they believe that they are thinking of nothing but God. Yet in their innermost minds they know too that all is not well; that if it were there would not be this rigidity, with the eye and the mind focused on a nonexistent center, a fixed point, when the common sense of even an idiot would be enough to make him realize that nothing has stopped, that we and everything around us are moving forward continually, and that we are being modified constantly by the speed at which we travel

and the regions through which we pass, so that merely to think of ourselves as having arrived at some final resting place is a contradiction of fundamental logic, since even the dullest of us knows enough to realize that he is ignorant of everything, including the basic issue of whether we are really moving at all or whether the concept of motion is something that can even be spoken of in connection with such ignorant beings as we, for whom the term ignorant is indeed perhaps an overstatement, implying as it does that something is known somewhere, whereas in reality we are not even sure of this: we in fact cannot aver with any degree of certainty that we *are* ignorant. Yet this is not so bad; we have at any rate kept our open-mindedness—*that*, at least, we may be sure that we have—and are not in any danger, or so it seems, of freezing into the pious attitudes of those true spiritual bigots whose faces are turned toward eternity and who therefore can see nothing. We know that we are en route in a certain sense, and also that there has been a hitch somewhere: we have as it were boarded the train but for some unexplained reason it has not yet started. But there is in this as yet only slight delay matter for concern even for the likes of us, intelligent and only modestly expectant as we are, patient, meek without any overtones of ironic resignation before a situation we are powerless to change and secretly believe is likely to go from bad to worse. There is nothing of that in us, we are not bigots and we have kept an open mind, we have all our mobility in a word, yet we too sense a danger and we do not quite know how we are going to react. Those first few steps, in the prematurely mild air that a blizzard is surely destined to dash from living memory before tomorrow comes—aren't we in danger of accepting these only for what they are, of being thankful for them and letting our gratitude take the place of further inquiry into what they were like, of letting it stand both for our attitude as eternity will view it and also for the fulfillment of which this was just the promise? That surely is the danger we run in our state of sophisticated but innocent enlightenment: that of not *demanding* and getting a hearing, of not finding out where these steps were leading even in the teeth of an almost dead certainty that it was nowhere, even of doubting that they ever took place, that any kind of structure or fabric in which they would assume being could ever have existed. So that in our way we are

worse off or at least in worse danger than those others who imagine themselves already delivered from the chain of rebirth. *They* have their illusions to sustain them, even though these are full of holes and sometimes don't prevent their possessors from feeling the chilly drafts of doubt, while we can be brought to doubt that any of this, which we know in our heart of hearts to be a real thing, an event of the highest spiritual magnitude, ever happened. Here it is that our sensuality can save us *in extremis*: the atmosphere of the day that event took place, the way the trees and buildings looked, what we said to the person who was both the bearer and fellow recipient of that message and what that person replied, words that were not words but sounds out of time, taken out of any eternal context in which their content would be recognizable—these facts have entered our consciousness once and for all, have spread through us even into our pores like a marvelous antidote to the cup that the next moment had already prepared and which, whether hemlock or nectar, could only have proved fatal because it *was* the next, bringing with it the unspoken message that motion could be accomplished only in time, that is in a preordained succession of moments which must carry us far from here, far from this impassive but real moment of understanding which may be the only one we shall ever know, even if it is merely the first of an implied infinite series. But what if this were all? What if it were true that "once is enough"? That all consequences, all resonances of this singular event were to be cut off by virtue of its very singularity; nay, that even for memory, insofar as it can profit anyone, this instant were to be as though it had never existed, expunged from the chronicles of recorded time, fallen lower than the last circle of hell into a pit of total negation, and all this in our own best interests, so that we might not be led astray into imagining its goodness infinitely extendible, a thing that could never happen given the absolute and all-pervading nature of that goodness, destined to occur only once in the not-to-be-repeated cycle of eternity? Yet this seems not quite right, a little too pat perhaps, and here again it is our senses that are of some use to us in distinguishing verity from falsehood. For they never would have been able to capture the emanations from that special point of life if they were not meant to do something with them, weave them into the pattern of the days that come

after, sunlit or plunged in shadow as they may be, but each with the identifying scarlet thread that runs through the whole warp and woof of the design, sometimes almost disappearing in its dark accretions, but at others emerging as the full inspiration of the plan of the whole, grandly organizing its repeated vibrations and imposing its stamp on these until the meaning of it all suddenly flashes out of the shimmering pools of scarlet like a vast and diaphanous though indestructible framework, not to be lost sight of again? And here we may say that even if the uniqueness were meant to last only the duration of its unique instant, which I don't for a moment believe, but let us assume so for the sake of argument—even if this were the case, its aura would still be meant to linger on in our days, informing us of and gently prodding us toward the right path, even though we might correctly consider ourselves shut off from the main source, never to be in a position to contemplate its rightness again, yet despite this able to consider its traces in the memory as a supreme good, as a god come down to earth to instruct us in the ways of the other kingdom, for he sees that we have not progressed very far on our own—no farther than those first few steps in the suddenly mild open air. And we are lucky that he chooses so to deal with us, for as of this moment our worries are over, we have only to step forward to be in the right path, we are all walking in it and we always have been, only we never knew it. The end is still shrouded in mystery, but the mystery diminishes without exactly becoming clearer the more we advance, like a city whose plan begins to take shape on the horizon as we approach it, yet that is not precisely the case here because we certainly perceive no more of the divine enigma as we progress, it is just that its mystery lessens and comes to seem, whenever we stop to think of it which is not very often, the least important feature of the whole. What does matter is our growing sense of certainty, whether deduced by the intellect or the sensual intelligence (this is immaterial): it is there, and this is all we need bother about, just as there is no need to examine a man's ancestry or antecedents in evaluating his personal qualities. But, after the question of how did it get there, which we now perceive to be futile, another question remains: how are we to use it? Not only by what means, which is an important enough consideration, but toward what end? Toward our own

betterment and by extension that of the world around us or conversely toward the improvement of the world, which we might believe would incidentally render us as its citizens better people, even though this were just a side effect? The answer is in our morning waking. For just as we begin our lives as mere babes with the imprint of nothing in our heads, except lingering traces of a previous existence which grow fainter and fainter as we progress until we have forgotten them entirely, only by this time other notions have imposed themselves so that our infant minds are never a complete *tabula rasa*, but there is always something fading out or just coming into focus, and this whatever-it-is is always projecting itself on us, escalating its troops, prying open the shut gates of our sensibility and pouring in to augment its forces that have begun to take over our naked consciousness and driving away those shreds of another consciousness (although not, perhaps, forever—nothing is permanent—but perhaps until our last days when their forces shall again mass on the borders of our field of perception to remind us of that other old existence which we are now called to rejoin) so that for a moment, between the fleeing and the pursuing armies there is almost a moment of peace, of purity in which what we are meant to perceive could almost take shape in the empty air, if only there were time enough, and yet in the time it takes to perceive the dimness of its outline we can if we are quick enough seize the meaning of that assurance, before returning to the business at hand—just, I say, as we begin each day in this state of threatened blankness which is wiped away so soon, but which leaves certain illegible traces, like chalk dust on a blackboard after it has been erased, so we must learn to recognize it as the form—the only one—in which such fragments of the true learning as we are destined to receive will be vouchsafed to us, if at all. The unsatisfactoriness, the frowns and squinting, the itching and scratching as you listen without taking in what is being said to you, or only in part, so that you cannot piece the argument together, should not be dismissed as signs of our chronic all-too-human weakness but welcomed and examined as signs of life in which part of the whole truth lies buried. And as the discourse continues and you think you are not getting anything out of it, as you yawn and rub your eyes and pick your nose or scratch your head, or nudge your neighbor on

the hard wooden bench, this knowledge is getting through to you, and taking just the forms it needs to impress itself upon you, the forms of your inattention and incapacity or unwillingness to understand. For it is certain that you will rise from the bench a new person, and even before you have emerged into the full daylight of the street you will feel that a change has begun to operate in you, within your very fibers and sinews, and when the light of the street floods over you it will have become real at last, all traces of doubt will have been pulverized by the influx of light slowly mounting to bury those crass seamarks of egocentricity and warped self-esteem you were able to navigate by but which you no longer need now that the rudder has been swept out of your hands, and this whole surface of daylight has become one with that other remembered picture of light, when you were setting out, and which you feared would disappear because of its uniqueness, only now realizing that this singleness was the other side of the coin of its many-faceted diversity and interest, and that it may be simultaneously cherished for the former and lived in thanks to the versatility of the latter. It may be eaten, and breathed, and it would indeed have no reason to exist if this were not the case. So I think that the question of how we are going to use the reality of our revelation, as well as to what end, has now been resolved. First of all we see that these two aspects of our question are actually one and the same, that there is only one aspect as well as only one question, that to wonder how is the same as beginning to know why. For no choice is possible. In the early moments of wondering after the revelation had been received it could have been that this way of doing seemed to promise more, that that one had already realized its potential, that therefore there was matter for hesitation and the possibility of loss between a way that had already proved itself and another, less sure one that could lead to greener pastures, to cloud-cuckoo land and even farther, just because the implied risk seemed to posit a greater virtue in the acceptance. But it is certain now that these two ways are the same, that we *have* them both, the risk and the security, merely through being human creatures subject to the vicissitudes of time, our earthly lot. So that this second kind of happiness is merely a fleshed-out, realized version of that ideal first kind, and more to be prized because its now ripe contours unfold both the promise and the

shame of our human state, which they therefore proceed to transmute into something that is an amalgam of both, the faithful reflection of the idealistic concept that got us started along this path, but a reflection which is truer than the original because more suited to us, and whose shining perspectives we can feel and hold, clenching the journey to us like the bread and meat left by the wayside for the fatigued traveler by an anonymous Good Samaritan—ourselves, perhaps, just as Hop-o'-My-Thumb distributed crumbs along the way to guide him back in the dark, only these the birds have miraculously spared: they are ours. To know this is to be able to relax without any danger of becoming stagnant. Thus the difficulty of living with the unfolding of the year is erased, the preparing for spring and then for the elusive peace of summer, followed by the invigorating readjustments of autumn and the difficult and never very successful business of adapting to winter and the approach of another year. This way we are automatically attuned to these progressions and can forget about them; what matters is us and not what time makes of us, or rather it is what we make of ourselves that matters. What is this? Just the absorption of ourselves seen from the outside, when it is really what is going on inside us—all this overheard chatter and speculation and the noises of the day as it wears on into the calm of night, joyful or abysmal as it may be: this doesn't matter once we have accepted it and taken it inside us to be the interior walls of our chamber, the place where we live. And so all these conflicting meaningless details are transformed into something peaceful that surrounds, like wallpaper that could be decorated with scenes of shipwrecks or military attributes or yawning crevasses in the earth and which doesn't matter, which indeed can paradoxically heighten the feeling of a peaceful domestic interior. Yet this space wasn't made just for the uses of peace, but also for action, for planned assaults on the iniquity and terror outside, though this doesn't mean either that we shall have at some point to go outside or on the contrary that our plans will remain at the stage of dreams or armies in the fire: we carry both inside and outside around with us as we move purposefully toward an operation that is going to change us on every level, and is also going to alter the balance of power of happiness in the world in our favor and that of all the human beings in the world. And how is this to

become possible? Let us assume for the sake of argument that the blizzard I spoke of earlier has occurred, shattering the frail décor of your happiness like a straw house, replunging you and your world into the gray oblivion you had been floundering in all your life until the day your happiness was given to you as a gift, a reward or so it seemed for the stale unprofitable journey you called your life, only now it seemed that it was just beginning, and at the same moment you had an impression of stopping or ending. Apparently then happiness was to be a fixed state, but then you perceived that it was both fixed and mobile at the same time, like a fixed source of light with rays running out from and connecting back to it. This suited you very well, because it replied to your twin urges to act and to remain at peace with yourself and with the warring elements outside. And now these have again taken over and crushed your fragile dream of happiness, so that it all seems meaningless. Gazing out at the distraught but inanimate world you feel that you have lapsed back into the normal way things are, that what you were feeling just now was a novelty and hence destined to disappear quickly, its sole purpose if any being to light up the gloom around you sufficiently for you to become aware of its awesome extent, more than the eye and the mind can take in. The temptation here is to resume the stoic pose, tinged with irony and self-mockery, of times before. There was no point in arriving at this place, but neither, you suppose, would there have been any in avoiding it. It is all the same to you. And you turn away from the window almost with a sense of relief, to bury yourself again in the task of sorting out the jumbled scrap basket of your recent days, without any hope of completing it or even caring whether it gets done or not. But you find that you are unable to pick up the threads where you left off; the details of things shift and their edges swim before your tired eyes; it is impossible to make even the rudimentary sense of them that you once could. You see that you cannot do without it, that singular isolated moment that has now already slipped so far into the past that it seems a mere spark. You cannot do without it and you cannot have it. At this point a drowsiness overtakes you as of total fatigue and indifference; in this unnatural, dreamy state the objects you have been contemplating take on a life of their own, in and for themselves. It seems to you that

you are eavesdropping and can understand their private language. They are not talking about you at all, but are telling each other curious private stories about things you can only half comprehend, and other things that have a meaning only for themselves and are beyond any kind of understanding. And these in turn would know other sets of objects, limited to their own perceptions and at the limit of the scope of visibility of those that discuss them and dream about them. It could be that time and space are filled up with these to infinity and beyond; that there is no such thing as a void, only endless lists of things that may or may not be aware of one another, the "sad variety of woe." And this pointless diversity plunges you into a numbing despair and blankness. The whole world seems dyed the same melancholy hue. Nothing in it can arouse your feelings. Even the sun seems dead. And all because you succumbed to what seemed an innocent and perfectly natural craving, to have your cake and eat it too, forgetting that, widespread as it is, it cannot be excused on any human grounds because it cannot be realized. Therefore even to contemplate it is a sin. But, you say, in those first moments . . . Never mind that now. You must forget them. The dream that was fleetingly revealed to you was a paradox, and for this reason must be forgotten as quickly as possible. But, you continue to argue, it mattered precisely because it was a paradox and about to be realized here on earth, in human terms; otherwise one would have forgotten it as quickly as any morning dream that clings to you in the first few waking moments, until its incongruities become blatant in the reasonable daylight that seeps back into your consciousness. It was not a case of a spoiled child asking its mother for something for the nth time or of wishing on a star; it was a *new arrangement* that existed and was on the point of working. And now it is all the same; any miracles, if there ever are any again, will be partial ones, mere virtuosic exhibitions beside the incontrovertible reality of that other, as amazingly real as a new element or a new dimension. And so it goes. But if it was indeed as real as all that, then it *was* real, and therefore it *is* real. Just as matter cannot be added to or subtracted from the universe, or energy destroyed; so with something real, that is, real in the sense you understood it and understand it. When will you realize that your dreams have eternal life? I of course don't mean that

you are a moonstruck dreamer, but that they do exist, outside of you, without your having to do anything about it. Even if you do something it won't matter. And it is possible that you will always remain unaware of their existence; this won't matter either, to them, that is. But you must try to seize the truth of this: whatever was, is, and must be. The darkness that surrounds you now does not exist, because it never had any independent existence: you created it out of the spleen and torment you felt. It looks real enough to hide you from the light of the sun, but its reality is as specious as that of a mirage. The clouds are dispersing. And nothing comes to take their place, to interpose itself between you and the reality which you dreamed and which is therefore real. This new arrangement is already guiding your steps and indicating the direction you should take without your realizing it, for it is invisible now; it still seems that it is lost for there is of course no tangible evidence of it: *that* happens only once, it is true. But now to have absorbed the lesson, to have recovered from the shock of not being able to remember it, to again be setting out from the beginning—is this not something good to you? You no longer have to remember the principles, they seem to come to you like fragments of a buried language you once knew. You are like the prince in the fairy tale before whom the impenetrable forest opened and then the gates of the castle, without his knowing why. The one thing you want is to pause so as to puzzle all this out, but that is impossible; you are moving much too quickly for your momentum to be halted. How will it all turn out? What will the end be? But these are questions of the ignorant novice which you have forgotten about already. You think now only in terms of the speed with which you advance, and which you drink in like oxygen; it has become the element in which you live and which is you. Nothing else matters.

And so, not bothering about anything, you again took things into your own hands. You were a little incredulous as to the outcome, but you decided to try it anyway. Who could tell what would happen? It didn't do to dwell too much on those ideal forms of happiness that had haunted you ever since the cradle and had now defined themselves almost in a paroxysm; they could be

assigned to the corners and cubbyholes of your mind since it didn't matter whether they were in evidence as long as you never actually lost sight of them. What did matter now was getting down to business, or back to the business of day-to-day living with all the tiresome mechanical problems that this implies. And it was just here that philosophy broke down completely and was of no use. How to deal with the new situations that arise each day in bunches or clusters, and which resist categorization to the point where any rational attempt to deal with them is doomed from the start? And in particular how to deal with this one that faces you now, which has probably been with you always; now it has a different name and a different curriculum vitae; its qualities are combined in such a way as to seem different from all that has gone before, but actually it is the same old surprise that you have always lived with. Forget about the details of name and place, forget also the concepts and archetypes that haunt you and which are as much a part of the typical earthbound situation you find yourself in as those others: neither the concept nor the state of affairs logically deduced from it is going to be of much help to you now. What is required is the ability to enter into the complexities of the situation as though it really weren't new at all, which it isn't, as one takes the first few steps into a labyrinth. Here one abruptly finds one's intuition tailored to the needs of the new demanding syndrome; each test is passed flawlessly, as though in a dream, and the complex climate that is formed by the vacillating wills and energies of the many who surround you becomes as easy as pie for you. You take on all comers but you do not advertise your presence. Right now it is important to slip as quickly as possible into the Gordian contours of the dank, barren morass (or so it seems at present) without uttering so much as a syllable; to live in that labyrinth that seems to be directing your steps but in reality it is you who are creating its pattern, embarked on a new, fantastically difficult tactic whose success is nevertheless guaranteed. You know this. But it will be a long time before the ordinary assurances will be able to make themselves felt in the strange, closed-off state you are in now. You may as well forget them and abandon yourself to the secret growing that has taken over. Nothing can stop it, so there is no point in worrying about it or even thinking about it.

How we move around in our little ventilated situation, how roomy it seems! There is so much to do after all, so many people to be with, and we like them all. But meanwhile it seems as if our little space were moving counter to us, dragging us backward. We have reached this far point of where we are by following someone's advice, and at times it seems as though it might have been the wrong advice. If this were the case, to become aware of it would be no help because we have refined the baser elements out of our present situation and are technically on the same footing with others of different origins who meet and socialize with us. One sign of this is that no one remarks on the lateness of the hour, for we all believe we have reached a point where such details no longer count; we believe that we are immune to time because we are "out of" it. Yet we know dimly that the stillness we have attained is racing forward faster than ever toward its rendezvous with the encroaching past; we know this and we turn from it, to take refuge in dreams where all is not exactly well either, in which we reach the summit of our aspirations to find the mass below riddled and honeycombed with vacancy, yet there is room on the crest to move around in; it might almost qualify as an oasis. But as we all know, the thing about an oasis is that the whole desert has to become one before its exotic theories can benefit us, and even that would not be enough because then there would be too much of a contrast with the ordinary temperate climate leading up to it. Yet one can very well live and enjoy the fruits of one's considerable labors in arriving at this place which could be the end of the world in no unfavorable sense; there are the same things to look at and be surrounded by although in lesser numbers; what it is is quality as opposed to quantity. But can the one exist without the other? These thoughts oppress one in the social world one has built around oneself, especially the thought of those other infinite worlds upon worlds; and when one really examines one's own world in the harsher light of its happiness-potential one sees that it is a shambles indeed. Yet there is air to breathe. One may at least stay here a while hoping for more and better things to come.

That's the way it goes. For many weeks you have been exploring what seemed to be a profitable way of doing. You discovered that there was a fork in the road, so first you followed what seemed to be the less promising, or at any rate the more obvious, of the two branches until you felt you had a good idea of where it led. Then you returned to investigate the more tangled way, and for a time its intricacies seemed to promise a more complex and therefore a more practical goal for you, one that could be picked up in any number of ways so that all its faces or applications could be thoroughly scrutinized. And in so doing you began to realize that the two branches were joined together again, farther ahead; that this place of joining was indeed the end, and that it was the very place you set out from, whose intolerable mixture of reality and fantasy had started you on the road which has now come full circle. It has been an absorbing puzzle, but in the end all the pieces fit together like a ghost story that turns out to have a perfectly rational explanation. Nothing remains but to begin living with this discovery, that is, without the hope mentioned above. Even this is not so easy, for the reduced mode or scope must itself be nourished by a form of hope, or hope that doesn't take itself seriously. One must move very fast in order to stay in the same place, as the Red Queen said, the reason being that once you have decided there is no alternative to remaining motionless you must still learn to cope with the onrushing tide of time and all the confusing phenomena it bears in its wake, some of which perfectly resemble the unfinished but seemingly salvageable states of reality at cross-purposes with itself that first caused you to grow restless, to begin fidgeting with various impractical schemes that were in the end, we have seen, finally reduced to zero. Yet they cannot be banished from the system any more than physical matter can, and their nature, which is part and parcel of their existence, is to remain incomplete, clamoring for wholeness. So that now two quite other and grimmer alternatives present themselves: that of staying where you are and risking eventual destruction at the hands of those dishonest counselors of many aspects, or of being swept back by them into a past drenched in nostalgia whose sweetness burns like gall. And it is a choice that we have to make.

As a lost dog on the edge of a sidewalk timidly approaches first one passerby and then another, uncertain of what to ask for, taking a few embarrassed steps in one direction and then suddenly veering to another before being able to ascertain what reception his mute entreaty might have met with, lost, puzzled, ashamed, ready to slink back into his inner confusion at the first brush with the outside world, so your aspirations, my soul, on this busy thoroughfare that is the great highway of life. What do you think to gain from merely standing there looking worried, while the tide of humanity sweeps ever onward, toward some goal it gives every sign of being as intimately acquainted with as you are with the sharp-edged problems that beset you from every angle? Do you really think that if you succeed in looking pathetic enough some kindly stranger will stop to ask your name and address and then steer you safely to your very door? No, I do not think you are afflicted with that kind of presumption, and yet your pitiable waif's stance, that inquiring look that darts uneasily from side to side as though to ward off a blow—these do not argue in your favor, even though we both know you to be a strong upright character, far above such cheap attempts to play on the emotions of others. And there is no use trying to tell them that the touching melancholy of your stare is the product not of self-pity but of a lucid attempt to find out just where you stand in the fast-moving stream of traffic that flows endlessly from horizon to horizon like a dark river. We know that the pose you happen to be striking for the world to see matters nothing to you, it could just as easily be some other one, joyous-looking or haughty and overbearing, or whatever. It is only that you happened to be wearing this look as you arrived at the end of your perusal of the way left open to you, and it "froze" on you, just as your mother warned you it would when you were little. And now it is the face you show to the world, the face of expectancy, strange as it seems. Perhaps Childe Roland wore such a look as he drew nearer to the Dark Tower, every energy concentrated toward the encounter with the King of Elfland, reasonably certain of the victorious outcome, yet not so much as to erase the premature lines of care from his pale and tear-stained face. Maybe it is just that you don't want to outrage anyone, especially now that the moment of your own encounter seems to be getting closer. You can

feel it in every pore, in the sudden hush that falls over the din of the busy street and the unusual darkness in the sky even though no clouds are apparent. Your miserable premature spring has finally turned into the real thing, confirmed by the calendar, but what a sad look it wears, especially after its promising beginnings that now seem so far back in the past. The air is moist and almost black, and sharp with the chill; the magnolia petals flatten and fall off one after the other onto the half-frozen mud of the ground where only a few spears of sickly green grass have managed to lift their heads. All this comes as no surprise, it is even somewhat of a relief, and better than the dire sequel that those precocious moments seemed to promise, cataclysms instead of the ominous hush that now lies over everything. And who is to say whether or not this silence isn't the very one you requested so as to be able to speak? Perhaps it seems ominous only because it is concentrating so intensely on you and what you have to say.

"Whatever was, is, and must be"—these words occur again to you now, though in a different register, transposed from a major into a minor key. Yet they are the same words as before. Their meaning is the same, only you have changed: you are viewing it all from a different angle, perhaps not more nor less accurate than the previous one, but in any case a necessary one no doubt for the in-the-round effect to be achieved. We see it all now. The thing that our actions have accomplished, and its results for us. And it is no longer a nameless thing, but something colorful and full of interest, a chronicle play of our lives, with the last act still in the dim future, so that we can't tell yet whether it is a comedy or a tragedy, all we know is that it is crammed with action and the substance of life. Surely all this living that has gone on that is ours is good in some way, though we cannot tell why: we know only that our sympathy has deepened, quickened by the onrushing spectacle, to the point where we are like spectators swarming up onto the stage to be absorbed into the play, though always aware that this is an impossibility, and that the actors continue to recite their lines as if we weren't there. Yet in the end, we think, this may become possible; that is the time when audience and actor and writer and director all mingle joy

ously together as one, as the curtain descends a last time to separate them from the half-empty theater. When this happens—yet there is no point in looking to that either. The apotheosis never attracted you, only those few moments in the next-to-last act where everything suddenly becomes momentarily clear, to sink again into semi-obscurity before the final blaze which merely confirms the truth of what had been succinctly stated long before. But there does not seem to be any indication that this moment is approaching.

Except that the silence continues to focus on you. Who am I after all, you say despairingly once again, to have merited so much attention on the part of the universe; what does it think to get from me that it doesn't have already? I know too that my solipsistic approach is totally wrongheaded and foolish, that the universe isn't listening to me any more than the sea can be heard inside conch shells. But I'm just a mute observer—it isn't my fault that I can really notice how everything around me is waiting just for me to get up and say the word, whatever that is. And surely even the eyes of the beloved are fixed on you as though wondering, "What is he going to do *this* time?" And those eyes as well as the trees and skies that surround you are full of apprehension, waiting for this word that must come from you and that you have not in you. "What am I going to say?" But as you continue gazing embarrassedly into the eyes of the beloved, talking about extraneous matters, you become aware of an invisible web that connects those eyes to you, and both of you to the atmosphere of this room which is leading up to you after the vagaries of the space outside. Suddenly you realize that you have been talking for a long time without listening to yourself; you must have said *it* a long way back without knowing it, for everything in the room has fallen back into its familiar place, only this time organized according to the invisible guidelines that radiate out from both of you like the laws that govern a kingdom. Now there is so much to talk about that it seems neither of you will ever get done talking. And the word that everything hinged on is buried back there; by mutual consent neither of you examined it when it was pronounced and rushed to its final resting

place. It is doing the organizing, the guidelines radiate from its control; therefore it is good not to know what it is since its results can be known so intimately, appreciated for what they are; it is best then that the buried word remain buried for we were intended to appreciate only its fruits and not the secret principle activating them—to know this would be to know too much. Meanwhile it is possible to know just enough, and this is all we were supposed to know, toward which we have been straining all our lives. We are to read this in outward things: the spoons and greasy tables in this room, the wooden shelves, the flyspecked ceiling merging into gloom—good and happy things, nevertheless, that tell us little of themselves and more about ourselves than we had ever imagined it was possible to know. They have become the fabric of life.

Until, accustomed to disappointments, you can let yourself rule and be ruled by these strings or emanations that connect everything together, you haven't fully exorcised the demon of doubt that sets you in motion like a rocking horse that cannot stop rocking. You may have scored a few points there where you first took those few steps (no more than three, in all likelihood) when you first realized the enormity of the choice between two kinds of mutually exclusive universal happiness. And you also realized the error of forever ruminating on and repeating those fatal steps, like a broken movie projector that keeps showing the same strip of film—you realized this when you were already far from that experience which had indeed begun to take on the unearthly weirdness of an old photograph. You cried out in the desert and you collapsed into yourself, indifferent to the progress of the seasons and the planets in their orbits, and you died for the first time. And now that you have been raised from the tomb like Lazarus by obscure miraculous forces you are surprised that the earth isn't better than the one you left behind, that all things haven't yet perfected themselves as you believe you have done by dying and being resuscitated to the uncertain glory of this day in early spring. You can't get over the fact that conversations still sound the same, that clouds of unhappiness still persist in the unseen mesh that draws around everything, uniting it in a firm purpose as

it causes each individual thing to bulge more brightly and more darkly at the same time, drawing out the nature of its real being. But that is the wonder of it: that you have returned not to the supernatural glow of heaven but to the ordinary daylight you knew so well before it passed from your view, and which continues to enrich you as it steepes you and your ageless chattels of mind, imagination, timid first love and quiet acceptance of experience in its revitalizing tide. And the miracle is not that you have returned—you always knew you would—but that things have remained the same. The day is not far advanced: it still half-seriously offers with one hand the promise that it pockets with the other, and it is still up to you to seize the occasion, jump into the fray, not be ruled by its cruel if only human whims. The person sitting opposite you who asked you a question is still waiting for the answer; he has not yet found your hesitation unusual, but it is up to you to grasp it with both hands, wrenching it from the web of connectives to rub off the grime that has obscured its brilliance so as to restore it to him, that pause which is the answer you have both been expecting. When it was new everybody could tell this, but years of inactivity and your own inattention have tarnished it beyond recognition. It needs a new voice to tell it, otherwise it will seem just another awkward pause in a conversation largely made up of similar ones, and will never be able to realize its potential as a catalyst, turning you both in on yourself and outward to that crystalline gaze that has been the backing of your days and nights for so long now. For the time being only you know it for what it is, but as you continue to hold on to it others will begin to realize its true nature, until finally it stands as the shortest distance between your aims and those of the beloved, the only human ground that can nurture your hopes and fears into the tree of life that is as big as the universe and entirely fills it up with its positive idea of growth and gaining control. So it is permissible to rest here awhile in this pause you alone discovered: a little repose can do no harm at this stage; meanwhile do not fear that when you next speak the whole scene will come to life again, as though triggered by invisible machines. There is not much for you to do except wait in the anticipation of your inevitable reply.

Inevitable, but so often postponed. Whole eras of history have sprung up in the gaps left by these pauses, dynasties, barbarian invasions and so on until the grass and shards stage, and still the answer is temporarily delayed. During these periods one thought enclosed everything like the blue sky of history: that it really was this one and no other. As long as this is the case everything else can take its course, time can flow into eternity leaving a huge deltalike deposit whose fan broadens and broadens and is my life, the time I am taking; we get up in the morning and blow on some half-dead coals, maybe for the last time; my hair is white and straggly and I hardly recognize my face any more, yet none of this matters so long as your reply twists it all together, the transparent axle of this particular chapter in history. It seems that the blue of the sky is a little paler each morning, as happens toward the end of each epoch, yet one doesn't want to move hastily, but to continue at this half-savage, half-pastoral existence, until one day the unmistakable dry but deep accent is heard:

"You waited too long. And now you are going to be rewarded by my attention. Make no mistake: it will probably seem to you as though nothing has changed; nothing will show in the outward details of your life and each night you will creep tired and enraged into bed. Know however that I am listening. From now on the invisible bounty of my concern will be there to keep you company, and as you mature it will unlock more of the same space for you so that eventually all your territory will have become rightfully yours again."

I know now that I am no longer waiting, and that the previous part of my life in which I thought I was waiting and therefore only half-alive was not waiting, although it was tinged with expectancy, but living under and into this reply which has suddenly caused everything in my world to take on new meaning. It is as though I had picked up a thread which I had merely mislaid but which for a long time seemed lost. And all because I am certain

now, albeit for no very good reason, that it was this one and no other. The sadness that infected us as children and stayed on through adulthood has healed, and there can be no other way except this way of health we are taking, silent as it is. But it lets us look back on those other, seemingly spoiled days and re-evaluate them: actually they were too well-rounded, each bore its share of happiness and grief and finished its tale just as twilight was descending; those days are now an inseparable part of our story despite their air of immaturity and tentativeness; they have the freshness of early works which may be wrongly discarded later. Nor is today really any different: we are as childish as ever, it turns out, only perhaps a little better at disguising it, but we still want what we want when we want it and no power on earth is strong enough to deny it to us. But at least we see now that this is how things are, and so we have the sense to stop mistaking every so often under the guise of some apparently unrelated activity, because we think we shall be better satisfied this way; underneath the discreet behavior the desire is as imperious as ever, but after so many postponements we now realize that a little delay won't hurt and we can relax in the assurance of eventual satisfaction. This was the message of that day in the street, when you first perceived that conventional happiness would not do for you and decided to opt for the erratic kind despite the dangers that its need for continual growth and expansion exposed it to. This started you on your way, although it often seemed as though your feet had struck roots into the ground and you were doomed to grow and decay like a tree. Nevertheless you were aware of moving, whether it was you who were moving or the landscape moving forward toward you, and you could remain patient with the idea of growth as long as the concept of uniqueness—that one and no other—shone like a star in the sky above you.

Today your wanderings have come full circle. Having begun by rejecting the idea of oneness in favor of a plurality of experiences, earthly and spiritual, in fact a plurality of different lives that you lived out to your liking while time proceeded at another, imperturbable rate, you gradually became aware that the very diversity of these experiences was endangered

by its own inner nature, for variety implies parallelism, and all these highly individualistic ways of thinking and doing were actually moving in the same direction and constantly threatening to merge with one another in a single one-way motion toward that invisible goal of concrete diversity. For just as all kinds of people spring up on earth and imagine themselves very different from each other though they are basically the same, so all these ideas had arisen in the same head and were merely aspects of a single organism: yourself, or perhaps your desire to be different. So that now in order to avoid extinction it again became necessary to invoke the idea of oneness, only this time if possible on a higher plane, in order for the similarities in your various lives to cancel each other out and the differences to remain, but under the aegis of singleness, separateness, so that each difference might be taken as the type of all the others and yet remain intrinsically itself, unlike anything in the world. Which brings us to you and the scene in the little restaurant. You are still there, far above me like the polestar and enclosing me like the dome of the heavens; your singularity has become oneness, that is your various traits and distinguishing marks have flattened out into a cloudlike protective covering whose irregularities are all functions of its uniformity, and which constitutes an arbitrary but definitive boundary line between the new informal, almost haphazard way of life that is to be mine permanently and the monolithic samenesses of the world that exists to be shut out. For it has been measured once and for all. It would be wrong to look back at it, and luckily we are so constructed that the urge to do so can never waken in us. We are both alive and free.

If you could see a movie of yourself you would realize that this is true. Movies show us ourselves as we had not yet learned to recognize us—something in the nature of daily being or happening that quickly gets folded over into ancient history like yesterday's newspaper, but in so doing a new face has been revealed, a surface on which a new phrase may be written before it rejoins history, or it may remain blank and do so anyway; it doesn't matter because each thing is coming up in its time and receding into the past, and this is what we all expect and want. What does matter is

what becomes of it once it has entered the past's sacred precincts; when, bending under the weight of an all-powerful nostalgia, its every contour is at last revealed for what it was, but this can be known only in the past. It isn't wrong to look at things in this way—how else could we live in the present knowing it was the present except in the context of the important things that have already happened? No, one must treasure each moment of the past, get the same thrill from it that one gets from watching each moment of an old movie. These windows on the past enable us to see enough to stay on an even keel in the razor's-edge present which is really a no-time, continually straying over the border into the positive past and the negative future whose movements alone define it. Unfortunately we have to live in it. We are appalled at this. Because its no-time, no-space dimensions offer us no signposts, nothing to be guided by. In this dimensionless area a single step can be leagues or inches; the flame of a match can seem like an explosion on the sun or it can make no dent in the matte-gray, uniform night. The jolting and loss of gravity produce a permanent condition of nausea, always buzzing faintly at the blurred edge where life is hinged to the future and to the past. But only focus on the past through the clear movie-theater dark and you are a changed person, and can begin to live again. That is why we, snatched from sudden freedom, are able to communicate only through this celluloid vehicle that has immortalized and given a definitive shape to our formless gestures; we can live as though we had caught up with time and avoid the sickness of the present, a shapeless blur as meaningless as a carelessly exposed roll of film. There is hardness and density now, and our story takes on the clear, compact shape of the plot of a novel, with all its edges and inner passages laid bare for the reader, to be resumed and resumed over and over, that is taken up and put aside and taken up again.

What place is there in the continuing story for all the adventures, the wayward pleasures, the medium-size experiences that somehow don't fit in but which loom larger and more interesting as they begin to retreat into the past? There were so many things held back, kept back, because they didn't

fit into the plot or because their tone wasn't in keeping with the whole. So many of these things have been discarded, and they now tower on the brink of the continuity, hemming it in like dark crags above a valley stream. One sometimes forgets that to be all one way may be preferable to eclectic diversity in the interests of verisimilitude, even for those of the opposite persuasion; the most powerful preachers are those persuaded in advance and their unalterable lessons are deeply moving just because of this rigidity, having none of the tepidness of the meandering stream of our narration with its well-chosen and typical episodes, which now seems to be trying to bury itself in the landscape. The rejected chapters have taken over. For a long time it was as though only the most patient scholar or the recording angel himself would ever interest himself in them. Now it seems as though that angel had begun to dominate the whole story: he who was supposed only to copy it all down has joined forces with the misshapen, misfit pieces that were never meant to go into it but at best to stay on the sidelines so as to point up how everything else belonged together, and the resulting mountain of data threatens us; one can almost hear the beginning of the lyric crash in which everything will be lost and pulverized, changed back into atoms ready to resume new combinations and shapes again, new wilder tendencies, as foreign to what we have carefully put in and kept out as a new chart of elements or another planet—unimaginable, in a word. And would you believe that this word could possibly be our salvation? For we are rescued by what we cannot imagine: it is what finally takes us up and shuts our story, replacing it among the millions of similar volumes that by no means menace its uniqueness but on the contrary situate it in the proper depth and perspective. At last we have that rightness that is rightfully ours. But we do not know what brought it about.

It could be anything, you say. But it could not have been an exercise in defining the present when our position, our very lives depend on those fixed loci of past and future that leave no room for the nominal existence of anything else. But it turns out you have been pursuing the discussion in a leisurely way throughout January and February and now to a point farther

into the wilderness of this new year which makes such a commotion and goes by so quickly. These ample digressions of yours have carried you ahead to a distant and seemingly remote place, and it is here that you stop to give emphasis to all the way you have traveled and to your present silence. And it is here that I am quite ready to admit that I am alone, that the film I have been watching all this time may be only a mirror, with all the characters including that of the old aunt played by me in different disguises. If you need a certain vitality you can only supply it yourself, or there comes a point, anyway, when no one's actions but your own seem dramatically convincing and justifiable in the plot that the number of your days concocts. I have been watching this film, therefore, and now I have seen enough; as I leave the theater I am surprised to find that it is still daylight outside (the darkness of the film as well as its specks of light were so intense); I am forced to squint; in this way I gradually get an idea of where I am. Only this world is not as light as the other one; it is made gray with shadows like cobwebs that deepen as the memory of the film begins to fade. This is the way all movies are meant to end, but how is it possible to go on living just now except by plunging into the middle of some other one that you have doubtless seen before? It seems truly impossible, but invariably at this point we are walking together along a street in some well-known city. The allegory is ended, its coils absorbed into the past, and this afternoon is as wide as an ocean. It is the time we have now, and all our wasted time sinks into the sea and is swallowed up without a trace. The past is dust and ashes, and this incommensurably wide way leads to the pragmatic and kinetic future.

From  
*SELF-  
PORTRAIT  
IN A  
CONVEX  
MIRROR*



## *AS ONE PUT DRUNK INTO THE PACKET-BOAT*

I tried each thing, only some were immortal and free.  
Elsewhere we are as sitting in a place where sunlight  
Filters down, a little at a time,  
Waiting for someone to come. Harsh words are spoken,  
As the sun yellows the green of the maple tree. . . .

So this was all, but obscurely  
I felt the stirrings of new breath in the pages  
Which all winter long had smelled like an old catalogue.  
New sentences were starting up. But the summer  
Was well along, not yet past the mid-point  
But full and dark with the promise of that fullness,  
That time when one can no longer wander away  
And even the least attentive fall silent  
To watch the thing that is prepared to happen.

A look of glass stops you  
And you walk on shaken: was I the perceived?  
Did they notice me, this time, as I am,  
Or is it postponed again? The children  
Still at their games, clouds that arise with a swift  
Impatience in the afternoon sky, then dissipate  
As limpid, dense twilight comes.  
Only in that tooting of a horn  
Down there, for a moment, I thought  
The great, formal affair was beginning, orchestrated,  
Its colors concentrated in a glance, a ballade  
That takes in the whole world, now, but lightly,  
Still lightly, but with wide authority and tact.

The prevalence of those gray flakes falling?  
They are sun motes. You have slept in the sun  
Longer than the sphinx, and are none the wiser for it.  
Come in. And I thought a shadow fell across the door

But it was only her come to ask once more  
If I was coming in, and not to hurry in case I wasn't.

The night sheen takes over. A moon of cistercian pallor  
Has climbed to the center of heaven, installed,  
Finally involved with the business of darkness.  
And a sigh heaves from all the small things on earth,  
The books, the papers, the old garters and union-suit buttons  
Kept in a white cardboard box somewhere, and all the lower  
Versions of cities flattened under the equalizing night.  
The summer demands and takes away too much,  
But night, the reserved, the reticent, gives more than it takes.

\*

## WORSENING SITUATION

Like a rainstorm, he said, the braided colors  
Wash over me and are no help. Or like one  
At a feast who eats not, for he cannot choose  
From among the smoking dishes. This severed hand  
Stands for life, and wander as it will,  
East or west, north or south, it is ever  
A stranger who walks beside me. O seasons,  
Booths, *chaleur*, dark-hatted charlatans  
On the outskirts of some rural fete,  
The name you drop and never say is mine, mine!  
Some day I'll claim to you how all used up  
I am because of you but in the meantime the ride  
Continues. Everyone is along for the ride,  
It seems. Besides, what else is there?  
The annual games? True, there are occasions  
For white uniforms and a special language  
Kept secret from the others. The limes  
Are duly sliced. I know all this  
But can't seem to keep it from affecting me,  
Every day, all day. I've tried recreation,  
Reading until late at night, train rides  
And romance.

One day a man called while I was out  
And left this message: "You got the whole thing wrong  
From start to finish. Luckily, there's still time  
To correct the situation, but you must act fast.  
See me at your earliest convenience. And please,  
'Tell no one of this. Much besides your life depends on it."  
I thought nothing of it at the time. Lately  
I've been looking at old-fashioned plaids, fingering  
Starched white collars, wondering whether there's a way  
To get them really white again. My wife  
Thinks I'm in Oslo—Oslo, France, that is.

## *FORTIES FLICK*

The shadow of the Venetian blind on the painted wall,  
Shadows of the snake-plant and cacti, the plaster animals,  
Focus the tragic melancholy of the bright stare  
Into nowhere, a hole like the black holes in space.  
In bra and panties she sidles to the window:  
Zip! Up with the blind. A fragile street scene offers itself,  
With wafer-thin pedestrians who know where they are going.  
The blind comes down slowly, the slats are slowly tilted up.

Why must it always end this way?  
A dais with woman reading, with the ruckus of her hair  
And all that is unsaid about her pulling us back to her, with her  
Into the silence that night alone can't explain.  
Silence of the library, of the telephone with its pad,  
But we didn't have to reinvent these either:  
They had gone away into the plot of a story,  
The "art" part—knowing what important details to leave out  
And the way character is developed. Things too real  
To be of much concern, hence artificial, yet now all over the page,  
The indoors with the outside becoming part of you  
As you find you had never left off laughing at death,  
The background, dark vine at the edge of the porch.

## *AS YOU CAME FROM THE HOLY LAND*

of western New York state  
were the graves all right in their bushings  
was there a note of panic in the late August air  
because the old man had peed in his pants again  
was there turning away from the late afternoon glare  
as though it too could be wished away  
was any of this present  
and how could this be  
the magic solution to what you are in now  
whatever has held you motionless  
like this so long through the dark season  
until now the women come out in navy blue  
and the worms come out of the compost to die  
it is the end of any season

you reading there so accurately  
sitting not wanting to be disturbed  
as you came from that holy land  
what other signs of earth's dependency were upon you  
what fixed sign at the crossroads  
what lethargy in the avenues  
where all is said in a whisper  
what tone of voice among the hedges  
what tone under the apple trees  
the numbered land stretches away  
and your house is built in tomorrow  
but surely not before the examination  
of what is right and will befall  
not before the census  
and the writing down of names

remember you are free to wander away  
as from other times other scenes that were taking place  
the history of someone who came too late

the time is ripe now and the adage  
is hatching as the seasons change and tremble  
it is finally as though that thing of monstrous interest  
were happening in the sky  
but the sun is setting and prevents you from seeing it

out of night the token emerges  
its leaves like birds alighting all at once under a tree  
taken up and shaken again  
put down in weak rage  
knowing as the brain does it can never come about  
not here not yesterday in the past  
only in the gap of today filling itself  
as emptiness is distributed  
in the idea of what time it is  
when that time is already past

## SCHEHERAZADE

Unsupported by reason's enigma  
Water collects in squared stone catch basins.  
The land is dry. Under it moves  
The water. Fish live in the wells. The leaves,  
A concerned green, are scrawled on the light. Bad  
Bindweed and rank ragweed somehow forget to flourish here.  
An inexhaustible wardrobe has been placed at the disposal  
Of each new occurrence. It can be itself now.  
Day is almost reluctant to decline  
And slowing down opens out new avenues  
That don't infringe on space but are living here with us.  
Other dreams came and left while the bank  
Of colored verbs and adjectives was shrinking from the light  
To nurse in shade their want of a method  
But most of all she loved the particles  
That transform objects of the same category  
Into particular ones, each distinct  
Within and apart from its own class.  
In all this springing up was no hint  
Of a tide, only a pleasant wavering of the air  
In which all things seemed present, whether  
Just past or soon to come. It was all invitation.  
So much the flowers outlined along the night  
Alleys when few were visible, yet  
Their story sounded louder than the hum  
Of bug and stick noises that brought up the rear,  
Trundling it along into a new fact of day.  
These were meant to be read as any  
Salutation before getting down to business,  
But they stuck to their guns, and so much  
Was their obstinacy in keeping with the rest  
(Like long flashes of white birds that refuse to die  
When day does) that none knew the warp

Which presented this major movement as a firm  
Digression, a plain that slowly becomes a mountain.

So each found himself caught in a net  
As a fashion, and all efforts to wriggle free  
Involved him further, inexorably, since all  
Existed there to be told, shot through  
From border to border. Here were stones  
That read as patches of sunlight, there was the story  
Of the grandparents, of the vigorous young champion  
(The lines once given to another, now  
Restored to the new speaker), dinners and assemblies,  
The light in the old home, the secret way  
The rooms fed into each other, but all  
Was wariness of time watching itself  
For nothing in the complex story grew outside:  
The greatness in the moment of telling stayed unresolved  
Until its wealth of incident, pain mixed with pleasure,  
Faded in the precise moment of bursting  
Into bloom, its growth a static lament.

Some stories survived the dynasty of the builders  
But their echo was itself locked in, became  
Anticipation that was only memory after all,  
For the possibilities are limited. It is seen  
At the end that the kind and good are rewarded,  
That the unjust one is doomed to burn forever  
Around his error, sadder and wiser anyway.  
Between these extremes the others muddle through  
Like us, uncertain but wearing artlessly  
Their function of minor characters who must  
Be kept in mind. It is we who make this  
Jungle and call it space, naming each root,  
Each serpent, for the sound of the name

As it clinks dully against our pleasure,  
Indifference that is pleasure. And what would they be  
Without an audience to restrict the innumerable  
Passes and swipes, restored to good humor as it issues  
Into the impervious evening air? So in some way  
Although the arithmetic is incorrect  
The balance is restored because it  
Balances, knowing it prevails,  
And the man who made the same mistake twice is exonerated.

## GRAND GALOP

All things seem mention of themselves  
And the names which stem from them branch out to other  
referents.  
Hugely, spring exists again. The weigela does its dusty thing  
In fire-hammered air. And garbage cans are heaved against  
The railing as the tulips yawn and crack open and fall apart.  
And today is Monday. Today's lunch is: Spanish omelet, lettuce and  
tomato salad,  
Jello, milk and cookies. Tomorrow's: sloppy joe on bun,  
Scalloped corn, stewed tomatoes, rice pudding and milk.  
The names we stole don't remove us:  
We have moved on a little ahead of them  
And now it is time to wait again.  
Only waiting, the waiting: what fills up the time between?  
It is another kind of wait, waiting for the wait to be ended.  
Nothing takes up its fair share of time,  
The wait is built into the things just coming into their own.  
Nothing is partially incomplete, but the wait  
Invests everything like a climate.  
What time of day is it?  
Does anything matter?  
Yes, for you must wait to see what it is really like,  
This event rounding the corner  
Which will be unlike anything else and really  
Cause no surprise: it's too ample.

Water  
Drops from an air conditioner  
On those who pass underneath. It's one of the sights of our town.  
Puaagh. Vomit. Puaaaaagh. More vomit. One who comes  
Walking dog on leash is distant to say how all this  
Changes the minute to an hour, the hour  
To the times of day, days to months, those easy-to-grasp entities,  
And the months to seasons, which are far other, foreign

To our concept of time. Better the months—  
They are almost persons—than these abstractions  
That sift like marble dust across the unfinished works of the studio  
Aging everything into a characterization of itself.  
Better the cleanup committee concern itself with  
Some item that is now little more than a feature  
Of some obsolete style—cornice or spandrel  
Out of the dimly remembered whole  
Which probably lacks true distinction. But if one may pick it up,  
Carry it over there, set it down,  
Then the work is redeemed at the end  
Under the smiling expanse of the sky  
That plays no favorites but in the same way  
Is honor only to those who have sought it.

The dog barks, the caravan passes on.  
The words had a sort of bloom on them  
But were weightless, carrying past what was being said.  
“A nice time,” you think, “to go out:  
The early night is cool, but not  
Too anything. People parading with their pets  
Past lawns and vacant lots, as though these too were somehow  
imponderables  
Before going home to the decency of one’s private life  
Shut up behind doors, which is nobody’s business.  
It does matter a little to the others  
But only because it makes them realize how far their respect  
Has brought them. No one would dare to intrude.  
It is a night like many another  
With the sky now a bit impatient for today to be over  
Like a bored salesgirl shifting from foot to stockinged foot.”  
These khaki undershorts hung out on lines,  
The wind billowing among them, are we never to make a statement?  
And certain buildings we always pass which are never mentioned—

It's getting out of hand.

As long as one has some sense that each thing knows its place

All is well, but with the arrival and departure

Of each new one overlapping so intensely in the semi-darkness

It's a bit mad. Too bad, I mean, that getting to know each just for a  
fleeting second

Must be replaced by imperfect knowledge of the featureless whole,

Like some pocket history of the world, so general

As to constitute a sob or wail unrelated

To any attempt at definition. And the minor eras

Take on an importance out of all proportion to the story

For it can no longer unwind, but must be kept on hand

Indefinitely, like a first-aid kit no one ever uses

Or a word in the dictionary that no one will ever look up.

The custard is setting; meanwhile

I not only have my own history to worry about

But am forced to fret over insufficient details related to large

Unfinished concepts that can never bring themselves to the point

Of being, with or without my help, if any were forthcoming.

It is just the movement of the caravan away

Into an abstract night, with no

Precise goal in view, and indeed not caring,

That distributes this pause. Why be in a hurry

To speed away in the opposite direction, toward the other end of infinity?

For things can harden meaningfully in the moment of indecision.

I cannot decide in which direction to walk

But this doesn't matter to me, and I might as well

Decide to climb a mountain (it looks almost flat)

As decide to go home

Or to a bar or restaurant or to the home

Of some friend as charming and ineffectual as I am ,

Because these pauses are supposed to be life

And they sink steel needles deep into the pores, as though to say

There is no use trying to escape  
And it is all here anyway. And their steep, slippery sides defy  
Any notion of continuity. It is this  
That takes us back into what really is, it seems, history—  
The lackluster, disorganized kind without dates  
That speaks out of the hollow trunk of a tree  
To warn away the merely polite, or those whose destiny  
Leaves them no time to quibble about the means,  
Which are not ends, and yet . . . What precisely is it  
About the time of day it is, the weather, that causes people to note it  
painstakingly in their diaries  
For them to read who shall come after?  
Surely it is because the ray of light  
Or gloom striking you this moment is hope  
In all its mature, matronly form, taking all things into account  
And reapportioning them according to size  
So that if one can't say that this is the natural way  
It should have happened, at least one can have no cause for complaint  
Which is the same as having reached the end, wise  
In that expectation and enhanced by its fulfillment, or the absence of it.  
But we say, it cannot come to any such end  
As long as we are left around with no place to go.  
And yet it has ended, and the thing we have fulfilled we have become.

Now it is the impulse of morning that makes  
My watch tick. As one who pokes his head  
Out from under a pile of blankets, the good and bad together,  
So this tangle of impossible resolutions and irresolutions:  
The desire to have fun, to make noise, and so to  
Add to the already all-but-illegible scrub forest of graffiti on the shithouse  
wall.

Someone is coming to get you:  
The mailman, or a butler enters with a letter on a tray  
Whose message is to change everything, but in the meantime

One is to worry about one's smell or dandruff or lost glasses—  
If only the curtain-raiser would end, but it is interminable.  
But there is this consolation:  
If it turns out to be not worth doing, I haven't done it;  
If the sight appalls me, I have seen nothing;  
If the victory is pyrrhic, I haven't won it.  
And so from a day replete with rumors  
Of things being done on the other side of the mountains  
A nucleus remains, a still-perfect possibility  
That can be kept indefinitely. And yet  
The groans of labor pains are deafening; one must  
Get up, get out and be on with it. Morning is for sissies like you  
But the real trials, the ones that separate the men from the boys, come  
later.

Oregon was kinder to us. The streets  
Offered a variety of directions to the foot  
And bookstores where pornography is sold. But then  
One whiffs just a slight odor of madness in the air.  
They all got into their cars and drove away  
As in the end of a movie. So that it finally made no difference  
Whether this were the end or it was somewhere else:  
If it had to be somewhere it might as well be  
Here, on top of one. Here, as elsewhere,  
April advances new suggestions, and one may as well  
Move along with them, especially in view of  
The midnight-blue light that in turning itself inside out  
Offers something strange to the attention, a thing  
That is not itself, gnat whirling before my eyes  
At an incredible, tame velocity. Too pronounced after all  
To be that meaningless. And so on to afternoon  
On the desert, with oneself cleaned up, and the location  
Almost brand-new what with the removal of gum wrappers, etc.  
But I was trying to tell you about a strange thing

That happened to me, but this is no way to tell about it,  
By making it truly happen. It drifts away in fragments.  
And one is left sitting in the yard  
To try to write poetry  
Using what Wyatt and Surrey left around,  
Took up and put down again  
Like so much gorgeous raw material,  
As though it would always happen in some way  
And meanwhile since we are all advancing  
It is sure to come about in spite of everything  
On a Sunday, where you are left sitting  
In the shade that, as always, is just a little too cool.  
So there is whirling out at you from the not deep  
Emptiness the word "cock" or some other, brother and sister words  
With not much to be expected from them, though these  
Are the ones that waited so long for you and finally left, having given up  
hope.  
There is a note of desperation in one's voice, pleading for them,  
And meanwhile the intensity thins and sharpens  
Its point, that is the thing it was going to ask.  
One has been waiting around all evening for it  
Before sleep had stopped definitively the eyes and ears  
Of all those who came as an audience.  
Still, that poetry does sometimes occur  
If only in creases in forgotten letters  
Packed away in trunks in the attic—things you forgot you had  
And what would it matter anyway,  
That recompense so precisely dosed  
As to seem the falling true of a perverse judgment.  
You forget how there could be a gasp of a new air  
Hidden in that jumble. And of course your forgetting  
Is a sign of just how much it matters to you:  
"It must have been important."  
The lies fall like flaxen threads from the skies

All over America, and the fact that some of them are true of course  
Doesn't so much not matter as serve to justify  
The whole mad organizing force under the billows of correct delight.  
Surrey, your lute is getting an attack of nervous paralysis  
But there are, again, things to be sung of  
And this is one of them, only I would not dream of intruding on  
The frantic completeness, the all-purpose benevolence  
Of that still-moist garden where the tooting originates:  
Between intervals of clenched teeth, your venomous rondelay.

Ask a hog what is happening. Go on. Ask him.  
The road just seems to vanish  
And not that far in the distance, either. The horizon must have been  
moved up.  
So it is that by limping carefully  
From one day to the next, one approaches a worn, round stone tower  
Crouching low in the hollow of a gully  
With no door or window but a lot of old license plates  
Tacked up over a slit too narrow for a wrist to pass through  
And a sign: "Van Camp's Pork and Beans."  
From then on in: *angst*-colored skies, emotional withdrawals  
As the whole business starts to frighten even you,  
Its originator and promoter. The horizon returns  
As a smile of recognition this time, polite, unquestioning.  
How long ago high school graduation seems  
Yet it cannot have been so very long:  
One has traveled such a short distance.  
The styles haven't changed much,  
And I still have a sweater and one or two other things I had then.  
It seems only yesterday that we saw  
The movie with the cows in it  
And turned to one at your side, who burped  
As morning saw a new garnet-and-pea-green order propose  
Itself out of the endless bathos, like science-fiction lumps.

Impossible not to be moved by the tiny number  
Those people wore, indicating they should be raised to this or  
that power.  
But now we are at Cape Fear and the overland trail  
Is impassable, and a dense curtain of mist hangs over the sea.

## *HOP O' MY THUMB*

The grand hotels, dancing girls  
Urge forward under a veil of "lost illusion"  
The deed to this day or some other day.  
There is no day in the calendar  
The dairy company sent out  
That lets you possess it wildly like  
The body of a dreaming woman in a dream:  
All flop over at the top when seized,  
The stem too slender, the top too loose and heavy,  
Blushing with fine foliage of dreams.  
The motor cars, tinsel hats,  
Supper of cakes, the amorous children  
Take the solitary downward path of dreams  
And are not seen again.  
What is it, Undine?  
The notes now can scarcely be heard  
In the hubbub of the flattening storm,  
With the third wish unspoken.

I remember meeting you in a dark dream  
Of April, you or some girl,  
The necklace of wishes alive and breathing around your throat.  
In the blindness of that dark whose  
Brightness turned to sand salt-glazed in noon sun  
We could not know each other or know which part  
Belonged to the other, pelted in an electric storm of rain.  
Only gradually the mounds that meant our bodies  
That wore our selves concaved into view  
But intermittently as through dark mist  
Smeared against fog. No worse time to have come,  
Yet all was desiring though already desired and past,  
The moment a monument to itself  
No one would ever see or know was there.

That time faded too and the night  
Softened to smooth spirals or foliage at night.  
There were sleeping cabins near by, blind lanterns,  
Nocturnal friendliness of the plate of milk left for the fairies  
Who otherwise might be less well disposed:  
Friendship of white sheets patched with milk.  
And always an open darkness in which one name  
Cries over and over again: Ariane! Ariane!  
Was it for this you led your sisters back from sleep  
And now he of the blue beard has outmaneuvered you?  
But for the best perhaps: let  
Those sisters slink into the sapphire  
Hair that is mounting day.  
There are still other made-up countries  
Where we can hide forever,  
Wasted with eternal desire and sadness,  
Sucking the sherbets, crooning the tunes, naming the names.

## MIXED FEELINGS

A pleasant smell of frying sausages  
Attacks the sense, along with an old, mostly invisible  
Photograph of what seems to be girls lounging around  
An old fighter bomber, circa 1942 vintage.  
How to explain to these girls, if indeed that's what they are,  
These Ruths, Lindas, Pats and Sheilas  
About the vast change that's taken place  
In the fabric of our society, altering the texture  
Of all things in it? And yet  
They somehow look as if they knew, except  
That it's so hard to see them, it's hard to figure out  
Exactly what kind of expressions they're wearing.  
What are your hobbies, girls? Aw nerts,  
One of them might say, this guy's too much for me.  
Let's go on and out, somewhere  
Through the canyons of the garment center  
To a small café and have a cup of coffee.  
I am not offended that these creatures (that's the word)  
Of my imagination seem to hold me in such light esteem,  
Pay so little heed to me. It's part of a complicated  
Flirtation routine, anyhow, no doubt. But this talk of  
The garment center? Surely that's California sunlight  
Belaboring them and the old crate on which they  
Have draped themselves, fading its Donald Duck insignia  
To the extreme point of legibility.  
Maybe they were lying but more likely their  
Tiny intelligences cannot retain much information.  
Not even one fact, perhaps. That's why  
They think they're in New York. I like the way  
They look and act and feel. I wonder  
How they got that way, but am not going to  
Waste any more time thinking about them.  
I have already forgotten them  
Until some day in the not too distant future

When we meet possibly in the lounge of a modern airport,  
They looking as astonishingly young and fresh as when this picture was  
made  
But full of contradictory ideas, stupid ones as well as  
Worthwhile ones, but all flooding the surface of our minds  
As we babble about the sky and the weather and the forests of change.

# MÄRCHENBILDER

*Es war einmal* . . . No, it's too heavy  
To be said. Besides, you aren't paying attention any more.  
How shall I put it?

"The rain thundered on the uneven red flagstones.

The steadfast tin soldier gazed beyond the drops  
Remembering the hat-shaped paper boat, that soon . . ."  
That's not it either.  
Think about the long summer evenings of the past, the queen anne's lace.

Sometimes a musical phrase would perfectly sum up  
The mood of a moment. One of those lovelorn sonatas  
For wind instruments was riding past on a solemn white horse.  
Everybody wondered who the new arrival was.

Pomp of flowers, decorations  
Junked next day. Now look out of the window.  
The sky is clear and bland. The wrong kind of day  
For business or games, or betting on a sure thing.

The trees weep drops  
Into the water at night. Slowly couples gather.  
She looks into his eyes. "It would not be good  
To be left alone." He: "I'll stay

As long as the night allows." 'This was one of those night rainbows  
In negative color. As we advance, it retreats; we see . . .  
We are now far into a cave, must be. Yet there seem to be  
Trees all around, and a wind lifts their leaves, slightly.

I want to go back, out of the bad stories,  
But there's always the possibility that the next one . . .  
No, it's another almond tree, or a ring-swallowing frog . . .  
Yet they are beautiful as we people them

With ourselves. They are empty as cupboards.  
To spend whole days drenched in them, waiting for the next whisper,  
For the word in the next room. This is how the princes must have  
behaved,  
Lying down in the frugality of sleep.

## OLEUM MISERICORDIAE

To rub it out, make it less virulent  
And a stab too at rearranging  
The whole thing from the ground up.  
Yes we were waiting just now  
Yes we are no longer waiting.

Afterwards when I tell you  
It's as though it all only happened  
As siding of my story

I beg you to listen  
You are already listening

It has shut itself out  
And in doing so shut us accidentally in

And meanwhile my story goes well  
The first chapter                      endeth

But the real story, the one  
They tell us we shall probably never know  
Drifts back in bits and pieces  
All of them, it turns out

So lucky  
Now we really know  
It all happened by chance:  
A chance encounter  
The dwarf led you to the end of a street  
And pointed flapping his arms in two directions  
You forgot to misprize him  
But after a series of interludes  
In furnished rooms (describe wallpaper)

Transient hotels (mention sink and cockroaches)  
And spending the night with a beautiful married woman  
Whose husband was away in Centerville on business  
(Mention this wallpaper: the purest roses  
Though the creamiest and how  
Her smile lightens the ordeal  
Of the last 500 pages  
Though you never knew her last name  
Only her first: Dorothy)  
You got hold of the water of life  
Rescued your two wicked brothers Cash and Jethro  
Who promptly stole the water of life  
After which you got it back, got safely home,  
Saved the old man's life  
And inherited the kingdom.

But this was a moment  
Under the most cheerful sun.  
In poorer lands  
No one touches the water of life.

It has no taste  
And though it refreshes absolutely  
It is a cup that must also pass

Until everybody  
Gets some advantage, big or little  
Some reason for having come  
So far  
Without dog or woman  
So far alone, unasked.

## SELF-PORTRAIT IN A CONVEX MIRROR

As Parmigianino did it, the right hand  
Bigger than the head, thrust at the viewer  
And swerving easily away, as though to protect  
What it advertises. A few leaded panes, old beams,  
Fur, pleated muslin, a coral ring run together  
In a movement supporting the face, which swims  
Toward and away like the hand  
Except that it is in repose. It is what is  
Sequestered. Vasari says, "Francesco one day set himself  
To take his own portrait, looking at himself for that purpose  
In a convex mirror, such as is used by barbers . . .  
He accordingly caused a ball of wood to be made  
By a turner, and having divided it in half and  
Brought it to the size of the mirror, he set himself  
With great art to copy all that he saw in the glass,"  
Chiefly his reflection, of which the portrait  
Is the reflection once removed.  
The glass chose to reflect only what he saw  
Which was enough for his purpose: his image  
Glazed, embalmed, projected at a 180-degree angle.  
The time of day or the density of the light  
Adhering to the face keeps it  
Lively and intact in a recurring wave  
Of arrival. The soul establishes itself.  
But how far can it swim out through the eyes  
And still return safely to its nest? The surface  
Of the mirror being convex, the distance increases  
Significantly; that is, enough to make the point  
That the soul is a captive, treated humanely, kept  
In suspension, unable to advance much farther  
Than your look as it intercepts the picture.  
Pope Clement and his court were "stupefied"  
By it, according to Vasari, and promised a commission  
That never materialized. The soul has to stay where it is,

Even though restless, hearing raindrops at the pane,  
 The sighing of autumn leaves thrashed by the wind,  
 Longing to be free, outside, but it must stay  
 Posing in this place. It must move  
 As little as possible. This is what the portrait says.  
 But there is in that gaze a combination  
 Of tenderness, amusement and regret, so powerful  
 In its restraint that one cannot look for long.  
 The secret is too plain. The pity of it smart,  
 Makes hot tears spurt: that the soul is not a soul,  
 Has no secret, is small, and it fits  
 Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention.  
 That is the tune but there are no words.  
 The words are only speculation  
 (From the Latin *speculum*, mirror):  
 They seek and cannot find the meaning of the music.  
 We see only postures of the dream,  
 Riders of the motion that swings the face  
 Into view under evening skies, with no  
 False disarray as proof of authenticity.  
 But it is life englobed.  
 One would like to stick one's hand  
 Out of the globe, but its dimension,  
 What carries it, will not allow it.  
 No doubt it is this, not the reflex  
 To hide something, which makes the hand loom large  
 As it retreats slightly. There is no way  
 To build it flat like a section of wall:  
 It must join the segment of a circle,  
 Roving back to the body of which it seems  
 So unlikely a part, to fence in and shore up the face  
 On which the effort of this condition reads  
 Like a pinpoint of a smile, a spark  
 Or star one is not sure of having seen

As darkness resumes. A perverse light whose  
Imperative of subtlety dooms in advance its  
Conceit to light up: unimportant but meant.  
Francesco, your hand is big enough  
To wreck the sphere, and too big,  
One would think, to weave delicate meshes  
That only argue its further detention.  
(Big, but not coarse, merely on another scale,  
Like a dozing whale on the sea bottom  
In relation to the tiny, self-important ship  
On the surface.) But your eyes proclaim  
That everything is surface. The surface is what's there  
And nothing can exist except what's there.  
There are no recesses in the room, only alcoves,  
And the window doesn't matter much, or that  
Sliver of window or mirror on the right, even  
As a gauge of the weather, which in French is  
*Le temps*, the word for time, and which  
Follows a course wherein changes are merely  
Features of the whole. The whole is stable within  
Instability, a globe like ours, resting  
On a pedestal of vacuum, a ping-pong ball  
Secure on its jet of water.  
And just as there are no words for the surface, that is,  
No words to say what it really is, that it is not  
Superficial but a visible core, then there is  
No way out of the problem of pathos vs. experience.  
You will stay on, restive, serene in  
Your gesture which is neither embrace nor warning  
But which holds something of both in pure  
Affirmation that doesn't affirm anything.

The balloon pops, the attention  
Turns dully away. Clouds

In the puddle stir up into sawtoothed fragments.  
I think of the friends  
Who came to see me, of what yesterday  
Was like. A peculiar slant  
Of memory that intrudes on the dreaming model  
In the silence of the studio as he considers  
Lifting the pencil to the self-portrait.  
How many people came and stayed a certain time,  
Uttered light or dark speech that became part of you  
Like light behind windblown fog and sand,  
Filtered and influenced by it, until no part  
Remains that is surely you. Those voices in the dusk  
Have told you all and still the tale goes on  
In the form of memories deposited in irregular  
Clumps of crystals. Whose curved hand controls,  
Francesco, the turning seasons and the thoughts  
That peel off and fly away at breathless speeds  
Like the last stubborn leaves ripped  
From wet branches? I see in this only the chaos  
Of your round mirror which organizes everything  
Around the polestar of your eyes which are empty,  
Know nothing, dream but reveal nothing.  
I feel the carousel starting slowly  
And going faster and faster: desk, papers, books,  
Photographs of friends, the window and the trees  
Merging in one neutral band that surrounds  
Me on all sides, everywhere I look.  
And I cannot explain the action of leveling,  
Why it should all boil down to one  
Uniform substance, a magma of interiors.  
My guide in these matters is your self,  
Firm, oblique, accepting everything with the same  
Wraith of a smile, and as time speeds up so that it is soon  
Much later, I can know only the straight way out,

The distance between us. Long ago  
The strewn evidence meant something,  
The small accidents and pleasures  
Of the day as it moved gracelessly on,  
A housewife doing chores. Impossible now  
To restore those properties in the silver blur that is  
The record of what you accomplished by sitting down  
"With great art to copy all that you saw in the glass"  
So as to perfect and rule out the extraneous  
Forever. In the circle of your intentions certain spars  
Remain that perpetuate the enchantment of self with self:  
Eyebeams, muslin, coral. It doesn't matter  
Because these are things as they are today  
Before one's shadow ever grew  
Out of the field into thoughts of tomorrow.

Tomorrow is easy, but today is uncharted,  
Desolate, reluctant as any landscape  
To yield what are laws of perspective  
After all only to the painter's deep  
Mistrust, a weak instrument though  
Necessary. Of course some things  
Are possible, it knows, but it doesn't know  
Which ones. Some day we will try  
To do as many things as are possible  
And perhaps we shall succeed at a handful  
Of them, but this will not have anything  
To do with what is promised today, our  
Landscape sweeping out from us to disappear  
On the horizon. Today enough of a cover burnishes  
To keep the supposition of promises together  
In one piece of surface, letting one ramble  
Back home from them so that these  
Even stronger possibilities can remain

Whole without being tested. Actually  
 The skin of the bubble-chamber's as tough as  
 Reptile eggs; everything gets "programmed" there  
 In due course; more keeps getting included  
 Without adding to the sum, and just as one  
 Gets accustomed to a noise that  
 Kept one awake but now no longer does,  
 So the room contains this flow like an hourglass  
 Without varying in climate or quality  
 (Except perhaps to brighten bleakly and almost  
 Invisibly, in a focus of sharpening toward death—more  
 Of this later). What should be the vacuum of a dream  
 Becomes continually replete as the source of dreams  
 Is being tapped so that this one dream  
 May wax, flourish like a cabbage rose,  
 Defying sumptuary laws, leaving us  
 To awake and try to begin living in what  
 Has now become a slum. Sydney Freedberg in his  
*Parmigianino* says of it: "Realism in this portrait  
 No longer produces an objective truth, but a *bizarria*. . . .  
 However its distortion does not create  
 A feeling of disharmony. . . . The forms retain  
 A strong measure of ideal beauty," because  
 Fed by our dreams, so inconsequential until one day  
 We notice the hole they left. Now their importance  
 If not their meaning is plain. They were to nourish  
 A dream which includes them all, as they are  
 Finally reversed in the accumulating mirror.  
 They seemed strange because we couldn't actually see them.  
 And we realize this only at a point where they lapse  
 Like a wave breaking on a rock, giving up  
 Its shape in a gesture which expresses that shape.  
 The forms retain a strong measure of ideal beauty  
 As they forage in secret on our idea of distortion.

Why be unhappy with this arrangement, since  
Dreams prolong us as they are absorbed?  
Something like living occurs, a movement  
Out of the dream into its codification.

As I start to forget it  
It presents its stereotype again  
But it is an unfamiliar stereotype, the face  
Riding at anchor, issued from hazards, soon  
To accost others, "rather angel than man" (Vasari).  
Perhaps an angel looks like everything  
We have forgotten, I mean forgotten  
Things that don't seem familiar when  
We meet them again, lost beyond telling  
Which were ours once. This would be the point  
Of invading the privacy of this man who  
"Dabbled in alchemy, but whose wish  
Here was not to examine the subtleties of art  
In a detached, scientific spirit: he wished through them  
To impart the sense of novelty and amazement to the spectator"  
(Freedberg). Later portraits such as the Uffizi  
"Gentleman," the Borghese "Young Prelate" and  
The Naples "Antea" issue from Mannerist  
Tensions, but here, as Freedberg points out,  
The surprise, the tension are in the concept  
Rather than its realization.  
The consonance of the High Renaissance  
Is present, though distorted by the mirror.  
What is novel is the extreme care in rendering  
The velleities of the rounded reflecting surface  
(It is the first mirror portrait),  
So that you could be fooled for a moment  
Before you realize the reflection  
Isn't yours. You feel then like one of those

Hoffmann characters who have been deprived  
Of a reflection, except that the whole of me  
Is seen to be supplanted by the strict  
Otherness of the painter in his  
Other room. We have surprised him  
At work, but no, he has surprised us  
As he works. The picture is almost finished,  
The surprise almost over, as when one looks out,  
Startled by a snowfall which even now is  
Ending in specks and sparkles of snow.  
It happened while you were inside, asleep,  
And there is no reason why you should have  
Been awake for it, except that the day  
Is ending and it will be hard for you  
To get to sleep tonight, at least until late.

The shadow of the city injects its own  
Urgency: Rome where Francesco  
Was at work during the Sack: his inventions  
Amazed the soldiers who burst in on him;  
They decided to spare his life, but he left soon after;  
Vienna where the painting is today, where  
I saw it with Pierre in the summer of 1959; New York  
Where I am now, which is a logarithm  
Of other cities. Our landscape  
Is alive with filiations, shuttlings;  
Business is carried on by look, gesture,  
Hearsay. It is another life to the city,  
The backing of the looking glass of the  
Unidentified but precisely sketched studio. It wants  
To siphon off the life of the studio, deflate  
Its mapped space to enactments, island it.  
That operation has been temporarily stalled  
But something new is on the way, a new preciousity.

In the wind. Can you stand it,  
Francesco? Are you strong enough for it?  
This wind brings what it knows not, is  
Self-propelled, blind, has no notion  
Of itself. It is inertia that once  
Acknowledged saps all activity, secret or public:  
Whispers of the word that can't be understood  
But can be felt, a chill, a blight  
Moving outward along the capes and peninsulas  
Of your nervures and so to the archipelagoes  
And to the bathed, aired secrecy of the open sea.  
This is its negative side. Its positive side is  
Making you notice life and the stresses  
That only seemed to go away, but now,  
As this new mode questions, are seen to be  
Hastening out of style. If they are to become classics  
They must decide which side they are on.  
Their reticence has undermined  
The urban scenery, made its ambiguities  
Look willful and tired, the games of an old man.  
What we need now is this unlikely  
Challenger pounding on the gates of an amazed  
Castle. Your argument, Francesco,  
Had begun to grow stale as no answer  
Or answers were forthcoming. If it dissolves now  
Into dust, that only means its time had come  
Some time ago, but look now, and listen:  
It may be that another life is stocked there  
In recesses no one knew of; that it,  
Not we, are the change; that we are in fact it  
If we could get back to it, relive some of the way  
It looked, turn our faces to the globe as it sets  
And still be coming out all right:  
Nerves normal, breath normal. Since it is a metaphor

Made to include us, we are a part of it and  
Can live in it as in fact we have done,  
Only leaving our minds bare for questioning  
We now see will not take place at random  
But in an orderly way that means to menace  
Nobody—the normal way things are done,  
Like the concentric growing up of days  
Around a life: correctly, if you think about it.

A breeze like the turning of a page  
Brings back your face: the moment  
Takes such a big bite out of the haze  
Of pleasant intuition it comes after.  
The locking into place is "death itself,"  
As Berg said of a phrase in Mahler's Ninth;  
Or, to quote Imogen in *Cymbeline*, "There cannot  
Be a pinch in death more sharp than this," for,  
Though only exercise or tactic, it carries  
The momentum of a conviction that had been building.  
Mere forgetfulness cannot remove it  
Nor wishing bring it back, as long as it remains  
The white precipitate of its dream  
In the climate of sighs flung across our world,  
A cloth over a birdcage. But it is certain that  
What is beautiful seems so only in relation to a specific  
Life, experienced or not, channeled into some form  
Steeped in the nostalgia of a collective past.  
The light sinks today with an enthusiasm  
I have known elsewhere, and known why  
It seemed meaningful, that others felt this way  
Years ago. I go on consulting  
This mirror that is no longer mine  
For as much brisk vacancy as is to be  
My portion this time. And the vase is always full

Because there is only just so much room  
And it accommodates everything. The sample  
One sees is not to be taken as  
Merely that, but as everything as it  
May be imagined outside time—not as a gesture  
But as all, in the refined, assimilable state.  
But what is this universe the porch of  
As it veers in and out, back and forth,  
Refusing to surround us and still the only  
Thing we can see? Love once  
Tipped the scales but now is shadowed, invisible,  
Though mysteriously present, around somewhere.  
But we know it cannot be sandwiched  
Between two adjacent moments, that its windings  
Lead nowhere except to further tributaries  
And that these empty themselves into a vague  
Sense of something that can never be known  
Even though it seems likely that each of us  
Knows what it is and is capable of  
Communicating it to the other. But the look  
Some wear as a sign makes one want to  
Push forward ignoring the apparent  
Naïveté of the attempt, not caring  
That no one is listening, since the light  
Has been lit once and for all in their eyes  
And is present, unimpaired, a permanent anomaly,  
Awake and silent. On the surface of it  
There seems no special reason why that light  
Should be focused by love, or why  
The city falling with its beautiful suburbs  
Into space always less clear, less defined,  
Should read as the support of its progress,  
The easel upon which the drama unfolded  
To its own satisfaction and to the end

Of our dreaming, as we had never imagined  
It would end, in worn daylight with the painted  
Promise showing through as a gage, a bond,  
This nondescript, never-to-be defined daytime is  
The secret of where it takes place  
And we can no longer return to the various  
Conflicting statements gathered, lapses of memory  
Of the principal witnesses. All we know  
Is that we are a little early, that  
Today has that special, lapidary  
Todayness that the sunlight reproduces  
Faithfully in casting twig-shadows on blithe  
Sidewalks. No previous day would have been like this.  
I used to think they were all alike,  
That the present always looked the same to everybody  
But this confusion drains away as one  
Is always cresting into one's present.  
Yet the "poetic," straw-colored space  
Of the long corridor that leads back to the painting,  
Its darkening opposite—is this  
Some figment of "art," not to be imagined  
As real, let alone special? Hasn't it too its lair  
In the present we are always escaping from  
And falling back into, as the waterwheel of days  
Pursues its uneventful, even serene course?  
I think it is trying to say it is today  
And we must get out of it even as the public  
Is pushing through the museum now so as to  
Be out by closing time. You can't live there.  
The gray glaze of the past attacks all know-how:  
Secrets of wash and finish that took a lifetime  
To learn and are reduced to the status of  
Black-and-white illustrations in a book where colorplates  
Are rare. That is, all time

Reduces to no special time. No one  
 Alludes to the change; to do so might  
 Involve calling attention to oneself  
 Which would augment the dread of not getting out  
 Before having seen the whole collection  
 (Except for the sculptures in the basement;  
 They are where they belong).  
 Our time gets to be veiled, compromised  
 By the portrait's will to endure. It hints at  
 Our own, which we were hoping to keep hidden.  
 We don't need paintings or  
 Doggerel written by mature poets when  
 The explosion is so precise, so fine.  
 Is there any point even in acknowledging  
 The existence of all that? Does it  
 Exist? Certainly the leisure to  
 Indulge stately pastimes doesn't,  
 Any more. Today has no margins, the event arrives  
 Flush with its edges, is of the same substance,  
 Indistinguishable. "Play" is something else;  
 It exists, in a society specifically  
 Organized as a demonstration of itself.  
 There is no other way, and those assholes  
 Who would confuse everything with their mirror games  
 Which seem to multiply stakes and possibilities, or  
 At least confuse issues by means of an investing  
 Aura that would corrode the architecture  
 Of the whole in a haze of suppressed mockery,  
 Are beside the point. They are out of the game,  
 Which doesn't exist until they are out of it.  
 It seems like a very hostile universe  
 But as the principle of each individual thing is  
 Hostile to, exists at the expense of all the others  
 As philosophers have often pointed out, at least

*This* thing, the mute, undivided present,  
Has the justification of logic, which  
In this instance isn't a bad thing  
Or wouldn't be, if the way of telling  
Didn't somehow intrude, twisting the end result  
Into a caricature of itself. This always  
Happens, as in the game where  
A whispered phrase passed around the room  
Ends up as something completely different.  
It is the principle that makes works of art so unlike  
What the artist intended. Often he finds  
He has omitted the thing he started out to say  
In the first place. Seduced by flowers,  
Explicit pleasures, he blames himself (though  
Secretly satisfied with the result), imagining  
He had a say in the matter and exercised  
An option of which he was hardly conscious,  
Unaware that necessity circumvents such resolutions  
So as to create something new  
For itself, that there is no other way,  
That the history of creation proceeds according to  
Stringent laws, and that things  
Do get done in this way, but never the things  
We set out to accomplish and wanted so desperately  
To see come into being. Parmigianino  
Must have realized this as he worked at his  
Life-obstructing task. One is forced to read  
The perfectly plausible accomplishment of a purpose  
Into the smooth, perhaps even bland (but so  
Enigmatic) finish. Is there anything  
To be serious about beyond this otherness  
That gets included in the most ordinary  
Forms of daily activity, changing everything  
Slightly and profoundly, and tearing the matter

Of creation, any creation, not just artistic creation  
 Out of our hands, to install it on some monstrous, near  
 Peak, too close to ignore, too far  
 For one to intervene? This otherness, this  
 "Not-being-us" is all there is to look at  
 In the mirror, though no one can say  
 How it came to be this way. A ship  
 Flying unknown colors has entered the harbor.  
 You are allowing extraneous matters  
 To break up your day, cloud the focus  
 Of the crystal ball. Its scene drifts away  
 Like vapor scattered on the wind. The fertile  
 Thought-associations that until now came  
 So easily, appear no more, or rarely. Their  
 Colorings are less intense, washed out  
 By autumn rains and winds, spoiled, muddied,  
 Given back to you because they are worthless.  
 Yet we are such creatures of habit that their  
 Implications are still around *en permanence*, confusing  
 Issues. To be serious only about sex  
 Is perhaps one way, but the sands are hissing  
 As they approach the beginning of the big slide  
 Into what happened. This past  
 Is now here: the painter's  
 Reflected face, in which we linger, receiving  
 Dreams and inspirations on an unassigned  
 Frequency, but the hues have turned metallic,  
 The curves and edges are not so rich. Each person  
 Has one big theory to explain the universe  
 But it doesn't tell the whole story  
 And in the end it is what is outside him  
 That matters, to him and especially to us  
 Who have been given no help whatever  
 In decoding our own man-size quotient and must rely

On second-hand knowledge. Yet I know  
That no one else's taste is going to be  
Any help, and might as well be ignored.  
Once it seemed so perfect—gloss on the fine  
Freckled skin, lips moistened as though about to part  
Releasing speech, and the familiar look  
Of clothes and furniture that one forgets.  
This could have been our paradise: exotic  
Refuge within an exhausted world, but that wasn't  
In the cards, because it couldn't have been  
The point. Aping naturalness may be the first step  
Toward achieving an inner calm  
But it is the first step only, and often  
Remains a frozen gesture of welcome etched  
On the air materializing behind it,  
A convention. And we have really  
No time for these, except to use them  
For kindling. The sooner they are burnt up  
The better for the roles we have to play.  
Therefore I beseech you, withdraw that hand,  
Offer it no longer as shield or greeting,  
The shield of a greeting, Francesco:  
There is room for one bullet in the chamber:  
Our looking through the wrong end  
Of the telescope as you fall back at a speed  
Faster than that of light to flatten ultimately  
Among the features of the room, an invitation  
Never mailed, the "it was all a dream"  
Syndrome, though the "all" tells tersely  
Enough how it wasn't. Its existence  
Was real, though troubled, and the ache  
Of this waking dream can never drown out  
The diagram still sketched on the wind,  
Chosen, meant for me and materialized

In the disguising radiance of my room.  
We have seen the city; it is the gibbous  
Mirrored eye of an insect. All things happen  
On its balcony and are resumed within,  
But the action is the cold, syrupy flow  
Of a pageant. One feels too confined,  
Sifting the April sunlight for clues,  
In the mere stillness of the ease of its  
Parameter. The hand holds no chalk  
And each part of the whole falls off  
And cannot know it knew, except  
Here and there, in cold pockets  
Of remembrance, whispers out of time.

From  
*HOUSEBOAT*  
*DAYS*



## *STREET MUSICIANS*

One died, and the soul was wrenched out  
Of the other in life, who, walking the streets  
Wrapped in an identity like a coat, sees on and on  
The same corners, volumetrics, shadows  
Under trees. Farther than anyone was ever  
Called, through increasingly suburban airs  
And ways, with autumn falling over everything:  
The plush leaves the chattels in barrels  
Of an obscure family being evicted  
Into the way it was, and is. The other beached  
Glimpses of what the other was up to:  
Revelations at last. So they grew to hate and forget each other.

So I cradle this average violin that knows  
Only forgotten showtunes, but argues  
The possibility of free declamation anchored  
To a dull refrain, the year turning over on itself  
In November, with the spaces among the days  
More literal, the meat more visible on the bone.  
Our question of a place of origin hangs  
Like smoke: how we picnicked in pine forests,  
In coves with the water always seeping up, and left  
Our trash, sperm and excrement everywhere, smeared  
On the landscape, to make of us what we could.

## THE OTHER TRADITION

They all came, some wore sentiments  
Emblazoned on T-shirts, proclaiming the lateness  
Of the hour, and indeed the sun slanted its rays  
Through branches of Norfolk Island pine as though  
Politely clearing its throat, and all ideas settled  
In a fuzz of dust under trees when it's drizzling:  
The endless games of Scrabble, the boosters,  
The celebrated omelette au Cantal, and through it  
The roar of time plunging unchecked through the sluices  
Of the days, dragging every sexual moment of it  
Past the lenses: the end of something.  
Only then did you glance up from your book,  
Unable to comprehend what had been taking place, or  
Say what you had been reading. More chairs  
Were brought, and lamps were lit, but it tells  
Nothing of how all this proceeded to materialize  
Before you and the people waiting outside and in the next  
Street, repeating its name over and over, until silence  
Moved halfway up the darkened trunks,  
And the meeting was called to order.

I still remember  
How they found you, after a dream, in your thimble hat,  
Studious as a butterfly in a parking lot.  
The road home was nicer then. Dispersing, each of the  
Troubadours had something to say about how charity  
Had run its race and won, leaving you the ex-president  
Of the event, and how, though many of those present  
Had wished something to come of it, if only a distant  
Wisp of smoke, yet none was so deceived as to hanker  
After that cool non-being of just a few minutes before,  
Now that the idea of a forest had clamped itself  
Over the minutiae of the scene. You found this  
Charming, but turned your face fully toward night,

Speaking into it like a megaphone, not hearing  
Or caring, although these still live and are generous  
And all ways contained, allowed to come and go  
Indefinitely in and out of the stockade  
They have so much trouble remembering, when your forgetting  
Rescues them at last, as a star absorbs the night.

## VARIANT

Sometimes a word will start it, like  
Hands and feet, sun and gloves. The way  
Is fraught with danger, you say, and I  
Notice the word "fraught" as you are telling  
Me about huge secret valleys some distance from  
The mired fighting—"but always, lightly wooded  
As they are, more deeply involved with the outcome  
That will someday paste a black, bleeding label  
In the sky, but until then  
The echo, flowing freely in corridors, alleys,  
And tame, surprised places far from anywhere,  
Will be automatically locked out—*vax*  
*Clamans*—do you see? End of tomorrow.  
Don't try to start the car or look deeper  
Into the eternal wimpling of the sky: luster  
On luster, transparency floated onto the topmost layer  
Until the whole thing overflows like a silver  
Wedding cake or Christmas tree, in a cascade of tears."

## WOODEN BUILDINGS

The tests are good. You need a million of them.  
You'd die laughing as I write to you  
Through leaves and articulations, yes, laughing  
Myself silly too. The funniest little thing . . .

That's how it all began. Looking back on it,  
I wonder now if it could have been on some day  
Findable in an old calendar? But no,  
It wasn't out of history, but inside it.  
That's the thing. On whatever day we came  
To a small house built just above the water,  
You had to stoop over to see inside the attic window.  
Someone had judged the height to be just right  
The way the light came in, and they are  
Giving that party, to turn on that dishwasher  
And we may be led, then, upward through more  
Powerful forms of poetry, past columns  
With peeling posters on them, to the country of indifference.  
Meanwhile if the swell diapasons, blooms  
Unhappily and too soon, the little people are nonetheless real.

## PYROGRAPHY

Out here on Cottage Grove it matters. The galloping  
Wind balks at its shadow. The carriages  
Are drawn forward under a sky of fumed oak.  
This is America calling:  
The mirroring of state to state,  
Of voice to voice on the wires,  
The force of colloquial greetings like golden  
Pollen sinking on the afternoon breeze.  
In service stairs the sweet corruption thrives;  
The page of dusk turns like a creaking revolving stage in Warren, Ohio.

If this is the way it is let's leave,  
They agree, and soon the slow boxcar journey begins,  
Gradually accelerating until the gyrating fans of suburbs  
Enfolding the darkness of cities are remembered  
Only as a recurring tic. And midway  
We meet the disappointed, returning ones, without its  
Being able to stop us in the headlong night  
Toward the nothing of the coast. At Bolinas  
The houses doze and seem to wonder why through the  
Pacific haze, and the dreams alternately glow and grow dull.  
Why be hanging on here? Like kites, circling,  
Slipping on a ramp of air, but always circling?

But the variable cloudiness is pouring it on,  
Flooding back to you like the meaning of a joke.  
The land wasn't immediately appealing; we built it  
Partly over with fake ruins, in the image of ourselves:  
An arch that terminates in mid-keystone, a crumbling stone pier  
For laundresses, an open-air theater, never completed  
And only partially designed. How are we to inhabit  
This space from which the fourth wall is invariably missing,  
As in a stage-set or dollhouse, except by staying as we are,  
In lost profile, facing the stars, with dozens of as yet

Unrealized projects, and a strict sense  
Of time running out, of evening presenting  
The tactfully folded-over bill? And we fit  
Rather too easily into it, become transparent,  
Almost ghosts. One day  
The birds and animals in the pasture have absorbed  
The color, the density of the surroundings,  
The leaves are alive, and too heavy with life.

A long period of adjustment followed.  
In the cities at the turn of the century they knew about it  
But were careful not to let on as the iceman and the milkman  
Disappeared down the block and the postman shouted  
His daily rounds. The children under the trees knew it  
But all the fathers returning home  
On streetcars after a satisfying day at the office undid it:  
The climate was still floral and all the wallpaper  
In a million homes all over the land conspired to hide it.  
One day we thought of painted furniture, of how  
It just slightly changes everything in the room  
And in the yard outside, and how, if we were going  
To be able to write the history of our time, starting with today,  
It would be necessary to model all these unimportant details  
So as to be able to include them; otherwise the narrative  
Would have that flat, sandpapered look the sky gets  
Out in the middle west toward the end of summer,  
The look of wanting to back out before the argument  
Has been resolved, and at the same time to save appearances  
So that tomorrow will be pure. Therefore, since we have to do our business  
In spite of things, why not make it in spite of everything?  
That way, maybe the feeble lakes and swamps  
Of the back country will get plugged into the circuit  
And not just the major events but the whole incredible  
Mass of everything happening simultaneously and pairing off,

Channeling itself into history, will unroll  
As carefully and as casually as a conversation in the next room,  
And the purity of today will invest us like a breeze,  
Only be hard, spare, ironical: something one can  
Tip one's hat to and still get some use out of.

The parade is turning into our street.  
My stars, the burnished uniforms and prismatic  
Features of this instant belong here. The land  
Is pulling away from the magic, glittering coastal towns  
To an aforementioned rendezvous with August and December.  
The hunch is it will always be this way,  
The look, the way things first scared you  
In the night light, and later turned out to be,  
Yet still capable, all the same, of a narrow fidelity  
To what you and they wanted to become:  
No sighs like Russian music, only a vast unravelling  
Out toward the junctions and to the darkness beyond  
To these bare fields, built at today's expense.

## THE GAZING GRAIN

The tires slowly came to a rubbery stop.  
Alliterative festoons in the sky noted  
That this branchy birthplace of presidents was also  
The big frigidaire-cum-cowbarn where mendicant

And margrave alike waited out the results  
Of the natural elections. So any openness of song  
Was the plainer way. O take me to the banks  
Of your Mississippi over there, etc. Like a plant

Rooted in parched earth I am  
A stranger myself in the dramatic lighting,  
The result of war. That which is given to see  
At any moment is the residue, shadowed

In gold or emerging into the clear bluish haze  
Of uncertainty. We come back to ourselves  
Through the rubbish of cloud and tree-spattered pavement.  
These days stand like vapor under the trees.

## UNCTUOUS PLATITUDES

There is no reason for the surcharge to bother you.  
Living in a city one is nonplussed by some

Of the inhabitants. The weather has grown gray with age.  
Poltergeists go about their business, sometimes

Demanding a sweeping revision. The breath of the air  
Is invisible. People stay

Next to the edges of fields, hoping that out of nothing  
Something will come, and it does, but what? Embers

Of the rain tamp down the shitty darkness that issues  
From nowhere. A man in her room, you say.

I like the really wonderful way you express things  
So that it might be said, that of all the ways in which to

Emphasize a posture or a particular mental climate  
Like this gray-violet one with a thin white irregular line

Descending the two vertical sides, these are those which  
Can also unsay an infinite number of pauses

In the ceramic day. Every invitation  
To every stranger is met at the station.

## *THE COUPLE IN THE NEXT ROOM*

She liked the blue drapes. They made a star  
At the angle. A boy in leather moved in.  
Later they found names from the turn of the century  
Coming home one evening. The whole of being  
Unknown absorbed into the stalk. A free  
Bride on the rails warning to notice other  
Hers and the great graves that outwore them  
Like faces on a building, the lightning rod  
Of a name calibrated all their musing differences.

Another day. Deliberations are recessed  
In an iron-blue chamber of that afternoon  
On which we wore things and looked well at  
A slab of business rising behind the stars.

## *BUSINESS PERSONALS*

The disquieting muses again: what are "leftovers"?  
Perhaps they have names for it all, who come bearing  
Worn signs of privilege whose authority  
Speaks out of the accumulation of age and faded colors  
To the center of today. Floating heart, why  
Wander on senselessly? The tall guardians  
Of yesterday are steep as cliff shadows;  
Whatever path you take abounds in their sense.  
All presently lead downward, to the harbor view.

Therefore do your knees need to be made strong, by running.  
We have places for the training and a special on equipment:  
Knee-pads, balancing poles and the rest. It works  
In the sense of aging: you come out always a little ahead  
And not so far as to lose a sense of the crowd  
Of disciples. That were tyranny,  
Outrage, hubris. Meanwhile this tent is silence  
Itself. Its walls are opaque, so as not to see  
The road; a pleasant, half-heard melody climbs to its ceiling—  
Not peace, but rest the doctor ordered. Tomorrow . . .  
And songs climb out of the flames of the near campfires,  
Pale, pastel things exquisite in their frailness  
With a note or two to indicate it isn't lost,  
On them at least. The songs decorate our notion of the world  
And mark its limits, like a frieze of soap-bubbles.

What caused us to start caring?  
In the beginning was only sedge, a field of water  
Wrinkled by the wind. Slowly  
The trees increased the novelty of always being alone,  
The rest began to be sketched in, and then . . . silence,  
Or blankness, for a number of years. Could one return  
To the idea of nature summed up in these pastoral images?  
Yet the present has done its work of building

A rampart against the past, not a rampart,  
A barbed-wire fence. So now we know  
What occupations to stick to (scrimshaw, spinning tall tales)  
By the way the songs deepen the color of the shadow  
Impregnating your hobby as you bend over it,  
Squinting. I could make a list  
Of each one of my possessions and the direction it  
Pointed in, how much each thing cost, how much for wood, string, colored  
ink, etc.

The song makes no mention of directions.  
At most it twists the longitude lines overhead  
Like twigs to form a crude shelter. (The ship  
Hasn't arrived, it was only a dream. It's somewhere near  
Cape Horn, despite all the efforts of Boreas to puff out  
Those drooping sails.) The idea of great distance  
Is permitted, even implicit in the slow dripping  
Of a lute. How to get out?  
This giant will never let us out unless we blind him.

And that's how, one day, I got home.  
Don't be shocked that the old walls  
Hang in rags now, that the rainbow has hardened  
Into a permanent late afternoon that elicits too-long  
Shadows and indiscretions from the bottom  
Of the soul. Such simple things,  
And we make of them something so complex it defeats us,  
Almost. Why can't everything be simple again,  
Like the first words of the first song as they occurred  
To one who, rapt, wrote them down and later sang them:  
"Only danger deflects  
The arrow from the center of the persimmon disc,  
Its final resting place. And should you be addressing yourself  
To danger? When it takes the form of bleachers

Sparsely occupied by an audience which has  
Already witnessed the events of which you write,  
Tellingly, in your log? Properly acknowledged  
It will dissipate like the pale pink and blue handkerchiefs  
That vanished centuries ago into the blue dome  
That surrounds us, but which are, some maintain, still here."

## CRAZY WEATHER

It's this crazy weather we've been having:  
Falling forward one minute, lying down the next  
Among the loose grasses and soft, white, nameless flowers.  
People have been making a garment out of it,  
Stitching the white of lilacs together with lightning  
At some anonymous crossroads. The sky calls  
To the deaf earth. The proverbial disarray  
Of morning corrects itself as you stand up.  
You are wearing a text. The lines  
Droop to your shoelaces and I shall never want or need  
Any other literature than this poetry of mud  
And ambitious reminiscences of times when it came easily  
Through the then woods and ploughed fields and had  
A simple unconscious dignity we can never hope to  
Approximate now except in narrow ravines nobody  
Will inspect where some late sample of the rare,  
Uninteresting specimen might still be putting out shoots, for all we know.

## ON THE TOWPATH

At the sign "Fred Muffin's Antiques" they turned off the road into a narrow lane lined with shabby houses.

If the thirst would subside just for awhile  
It would be a little bit, enough.

This has happened.

The insipid chiming of the seconds  
Has given way to an arc of silence  
So old it had never ceased to exist  
On the roofs of buildings, in the sky.

The ground is tentative.

The pygmies and jacaranda that were here yesterday  
Are back today, only less so.

It is a barrier of fact

Shielding the sky from the earth.

On the earth a many-colored tower of longing rises.

There are many ads (to help pay for all this).

Something interesting is happening on every landing.

Ladies of the Second Empire gotten up as characters from Perrault:

Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, the Sleeping Beauty,

Are silhouetted against the stained-glass windows.

A white figure runs to the edge of some rampart

In a hurry only to observe the distance,

And having done so, drops back into the mass

Of clock-faces, spires, stalactite machicolations.

It was the walking sideways, visible from far away,

That told what it was to be known

And kept, as a secret is known and kept.

The sun fades like the spreading

Of a peacock's tail, as though twilight

Might be read as a warning to those desperate

For easy solutions. This scalp of night  
Doesn't continue or break off the vacuous chatter  
That went on, off and on, all day:  
That there could be rain, and  
That it could be like lines, ruled lines scored  
Across the garden of violet cabbages,  
That these and other things could stay on  
Longer, though not forever of course;  
That other commensals might replace them  
And leave in their turn. No,

We aren't meaning that any more.  
The question has been asked  
As though an immense natural bridge had been  
Strung across the landscape to any point you wanted,  
The ellipse is as aimless as that,  
Stretching invisibly into the future so as to reappear  
In our present. Its flexing is its account,  
Return to the point of no return.

*BIRD'S-EYE VIEW  
OF THE TOOL AND DIE CO.*

For a long time I used to get up early.  
20-30 vision, hemorrhoids intact, he checks into the  
Enclosure of time familiarizing dreams  
For better or worse. The edges rub off,  
The slant gets lost. Whatever the villagers  
Are celebrating with less conviction is  
The less you. Index of own organ-music playing,  
Machinations over the architecture (too  
Light to make much of a dent) against meditated  
Gang-wars, ice cream, loss, palm terrain.

Under and around the quick background,  
Surface is improvisation. The force of  
Living hopelessly backward into a past of striped  
Conversations. As long as none of them ends this side  
Of the mirrored desert in terrorist chorales.  
The finest car is as the simplest home off the coast  
Of all small cliffs too short to be haze. You turn  
To speak to someone beside the dock and the lighthouse  
Shines like garnets. It has become a stricture.

## WET CASEMENTS

When Eduard Raban, coming along the passage,  
walked into the open doorway, he saw that it was  
raining. It was not raining much.

*KAFKA, Wedding Preparations in the Country*

The concept is interesting: to see, as though reflected  
In streaming windowpanes, the look of others through  
Their own eyes. A digest of their correct impressions of  
Their self-analytical attitudes overlaid by your  
Ghostly transparent face. You in falbalas  
Of some distant but not too distant era, the cosmetics,  
The shoes perfectly pointed, drifting (how long you  
Have been drifting; how long I have too for that matter)  
Like a bottle-imp toward a surface which can never be approached,  
Never pierced through into the timeless energy of a present  
Which would have its own opinions on these matters,  
Are an epistemological snapshot of the processes  
That first mentioned your name at some crowded cocktail  
Party long ago, and someone (not the person addressed)  
Overheard it and carried that name around in his wallet  
For years as the wallet crumbled and bills slid in  
And out of it. I want that information very much today,

Can't have it, and this makes me angry.  
I shall use my anger to build a bridge like that  
Of Avignon, on which people may dance for the feeling  
Of dancing on a bridge. I shall at last see my complete face  
Reflected not in the water but in the worn stone floor of my bridge.

I shall keep to myself.  
I shall not repeat others' comments about me.

## *SAYING IT TO KEEP IT FROM HAPPENING*

Some departure from the norm  
Will occur as time grows more open about it.  
The consensus gradually changed; nobody  
Lies about it any more. Rust dark pouring  
Over the body, changing it without decay—  
People with too many things on their minds, but we live  
In the interstices, between a vacant stare and the ceiling,  
Our lives remind us. Finally this is consciousness  
And the other livers of it get off at the same stop.  
How careless. Yet in the end each of us  
Is seen to have traveled the same distance—it's time  
That counts, and how deeply you have invested in it,  
Crossing the street of an event, as though coming out of it were  
The same as making it happen. You're not sorry,  
Of course, especially if this was the way it had to happen,  
Yet would like an exacter share, something about time  
That only a clock can tell you: how it feels, not what it means.  
It is a long field, and we know only the far end of it,  
Not the part we presumably had to go through to get there.  
If it isn't enough, take the idea  
Inherent in the day, armloads of wheat and flowers  
Lying around flat on handtrucks, if maybe it means more  
In pertaining to you, yet what is is what happens in the end  
As though you cared. The event combined with  
Beams leading up to it for the look of force adapted to the wiser  
Usages of age, but it's both there  
And not there, like washing or sawdust in the sunlight,  
At the back of the mind, where we live now.

## DAFFY DUCK IN HOLLYWOOD

Something strange is creeping across me.  
La Celestina has only to warble the first few bars  
Of "I Thought about You" or something mellow from  
*Amadigi di Gaula* for everything—a mint-condition can  
Of Rumford's Baking Powder, a celluloid earring, Speedy  
Gonzales, the latest from Helen Topping Miller's fertile  
Escritoire, a sheaf of suggestive pix on greige, deckle-edged  
Stock—to come clattering through the rainbow trellis  
Where Pistachio Avenue rams the 2300 block of Highland  
Fling Terrace. He promised he'd get me out of this one,  
That mean old cartoonist, but just look what he's  
Done to me now! I scarce dare approach me mug's attenuated  
Reflection in yon hubcap, so jaundiced, so *déconfit*  
Are its lineaments—fun, no doubt, for some quack phrenologist's  
Fern-clogged waiting room, but hardly what you'd call  
Companionable. But everything is getting choked to the point of  
Silence. Just now a magnetic storm hung in the swatch of sky  
Over the Fudds' garage, reducing it—drastically—  
To the aura of a plumbago-blue log cabin on  
A Gadsden Purchase commemorative cover. Suddenly all is  
Loathing. I don't want to go back inside any more. You meet  
Enough vague people on this emerald traffic-island—no,  
Not people, comings and goings, more: mutterings, splatterings,  
The bizarrely but effectively equipped infantries of happy-go-nutty  
Vegetal jacqueries, plumed, pointed at the little  
White cardboard castle over the mill run. "Up  
The lazy river, how happy we could be?"  
How will it end? That geranium glow  
Over Anaheim's had the riot act read to it by the  
Etna-size firecracker that exploded last minute into  
A *carte du Tendre* in whose lower right-hand corner  
(Hard by the jock-itch sand-trap that skirts  
The asparagus patch of algolagnic *nuits blanches*) Amadis  
Is cozening the Princesse de Clèves into a midnight micturition spree

On the Tamigi with the Wallets (Walt, Blossom, and little  
 Skee-zix) on a lamé barge "borrowed" from Ollie  
 Of the Movies' dread mistress of the robes. Wait!  
 I have an announcement! This wide, tepidly meandering,  
 Civilized Lethe (one can barely make out the maypoles  
 And *châlets de nécessité* on its sedgy shore) leads to Tophet, that  
 Landfill-haunted, not-so-residential resort from which  
 Some travellers return! This whole moment is the groin  
 Of a borborygmic giant who even now  
 Is rolling over on us in his sleep. Farewell bocages,  
 Tanneries, water-meadows. The allegory comes unsnarled  
 Too soon; a shower of pecky acajou harpoons is  
 About all there is to be noted between tornadoes. I have  
 Only my intermittent life in your thoughts to live  
 Which is like thinking in another language. Everything  
 Depends on whether somebody reminds you of me.  
 That this is a fabulation, and that those "other times"  
 Are in fact the silences of the soul, picked out in  
 Diamonds on stygian velvet, matters less than it should.  
 Prodigies of timing may be arranged to convince them  
 We live in one dimension, they in ours. While I  
 Abroad through all the coasts of dark destruction seek  
 Deliverance for us all, think in that language: its  
 Grammar, though tortured, offers pavilions  
 At each new parting of the ways. Pastel  
 Ambulances scoop up the quick and hie them to hospitals.  
 "It's all bits and pieces, spangles, patches, really; nothing  
 Stands alone. What happened to creative evolution?"  
 Sighed Aglavaine. Then to her Sélysette: "If his  
 Achievement is only to end up less boring than the others,  
 What's keeping us here? Why not leave at once?  
 I have to stay here while they sit in there,  
 Laugh, drink, have fine time. In my day  
 One lay under the tough green leaves,

Pretending not to notice how they bled into  
The sky's aqua, the wafted-away no-color of regions supposed  
Not to concern us. And so we too  
Came where the others came: nights of physical endurance,  
Or if, by day, our behavior was anarchically  
Correct, at least by New Brutalism standards, all then  
Grew taciturn by previous agreement. We were spirited  
Away *en bateau*, under cover of fudge dark.  
It's not the incomplete importunes, but the spookiness  
Of the finished product. True, to ask less were folly, yet  
If he is the result of himself, how much the better  
For him we ought to be! And how little, finally,  
We take this into account! Is the puckered garance satin  
Of a case that once held a brace of dueling pistols our  
Only acknowledging of that color? I like not this,  
Methinks, yet this disappointing sequel to ourselves  
Has been applauded in London and St. Petersburg. Somewhere  
Ravens pray for us."

The storm finished brewing. And thus  
She questioned all who came in at the great gate, but none  
She found who ever heard of Amadis,  
Nor of stern Aureng-Zebe, his first love. Some  
There were to whom this mattered not a jot: since all  
By definition is completeness (so  
In utter darkness they reasoned), why not  
Accept it as it pleases to reveal itself? As when  
Low skyscrapers from lower-hanging clouds reveal  
A turret there, an art-deco escarpment here, and last perhaps  
The pattern that may carry the sense, but  
Stays hidden in the mysteries of pagination.  
Not what we see but how we see it matters; all's  
Alike, the same, and we greet him who announces  
The change as we would greet the change itself.  
All life is but a figment; conversely, the tiny

Tome that slips from your hand is not perhaps the  
Missing link in this invisible picnic whose leverage  
Shrouds our sense of it. Therefore bivouac we  
On this great, blond highway, unimpeded by  
Veiled scruples, worn conundrums. Morning is  
Impermanent. Grab sex things, swing up  
Over the horizon like a boy  
On a fishing expedition. No one really knows  
Or cares whether this is the whole of which parts  
Were vouchsafed—once—but to be ambling on's  
The tradition more than the safekeeping of it. This mulch for  
Play keeps them interested and busy while the big,  
Vaguer stuff can decide what it wants—what maps, what  
Model cities, how much waste space. Life, our  
Life anyway, is between. We don't mind  
Or notice any more that the sky *is* green, a parrot  
One, but have our earnest where it chances on us,  
Disingenuous, intrigued, inviting more,  
Always invoking the echo, a summer's day.

## HOUSEBOAT DAYS

"The skin is broken. The hotel breakfast china  
Poking ahead to the last week in August, not really  
Very much at all, found the land where you began . . ."  
The hills smouldered up blue that day, again  
You walk five feet along the shore, and you duck  
As a common heresy sweeps over. We can botanize  
About this for centuries, and the little dazey  
Blooms again in the cities. The mind  
Is so hospitable, taking in everything  
Like boarders, and you don't see until  
It's all over how little there was to learn  
Once the stench of knowledge has dissipated, and the trouvailles  
Of every one of the senses fallen back. Really, he  
Said, that insincerity of reasoning on behalf of one's  
Sincere convictions, true or false in themselves  
As the case may be, to which, if we are unwise enough  
To argue at all with each other, we must be tempted  
At times—do you see where it leads? To pain,  
And the triumph over pain, still hidden  
In these low-lying hills which rob us  
Of all privacy, as though one were always about to meet  
One's double through the chain of cigar smoke  
And then it . . . happens, like an explosion in the brain,  
Only it's a catastrophe on another planet to which  
One has been invited, and as surely cannot refuse:  
Pain in the cistern, in the gutters, and if we merely  
Wait awhile, that denial, as though a universe of pain  
Had been created just so as to deny its own existence.  
But I don't set much stock in things  
Beyond the weather and the certainties of living and dying:  
The rest is optional. To praise this, blame that,  
Leads one subtly away from the beginning, where  
We must stay, in motion. To flash light  
Into the house within, its many chambers,

Its memories and associations, upon its inscribed  
And pictured walls, argues enough that life is various.  
Life is beautiful. He who reads that  
As in the window of some distant, speeding train  
Knows what he wants, and what will befall.

Pinpricks of rain fall again.

And from across the quite wide median with its  
Little white flowers, a reply is broadcast:

"Dissolve parliament. Hold new elections."

It would be deplorable if the rain also washed away  
This profile at the window that moves, and moves on,  
Knowing that it moves, and knows nothing else. It is the light  
At the end of the tunnel as it might be seen

By him looking out somberly at the shower,

The picture of hope a dying man might turn away from,  
Realizing that hope is something else, something concrete  
You can't have. So, winding past certain pillars

Until you get to evening's malachite one, it becomes a vast dream  
Of having that can topple governments, level towns and cities  
With the pressure of sleep building up behind it.

The surge creates its own edge

And you must proceed this way: mornings of assent,  
Indifferent noons leading to the ripple of the question  
Of late afternoon projected into evening.

Arabesques and runnels are the result

Over the public address system, on the seismograph at Berkeley.

A little simple arithmetic tells you that to be with you

In this passage, this movement, is what the instance costs:

A sail out of some afternoon, beyond amazement, astonished,  
Apparently not tampered with. As the rain gathers and protects  
Its own darkness, the place in the slipcover is noticed

For the first and last time, fading like the spine

Of an adventure novel behind glass, behind the teacups.

## *THE LAMENT UPON THE WATERS*

For the disciple nothing had changed. The mood was still  
Gray tolerance, as the road marched along  
Singing its little song of despair. Once, a cry  
Started up out of the hills. That old, puzzling persuasion

Again. Sex was part of this,  
And the shock of day turning into night.  
Though we always found something delicate (too delicate  
For some tastes, perhaps) to touch, to desire.

And we made much of this sort of materiality  
That clogged the weight of starlight, made it seem  
Fibrous, yet there was a chance in this  
To see the present as it never had existed,

Clear and shapeless, in an atmosphere like cut glass.  
At Latour-Maubourg you said this was a good thing, and on the steps  
Of Métro Jasmin the couriers nodded to us correctly, and the  
Pact was sealed in the sky. But now moments surround us

Like a crowd, some inquisitive faces, some hostile ones,  
Some enigmatic or turned away to an anterior form of time  
Given once and for all. The jetstream inscribes a final flourish  
That melts as it stays. The problem isn't how to proceed

But is one of being: whether this ever was, and whose  
It shall be. To be starting out, just one step  
Off the sidewalk, and as such pulled back into the glittering  
Snowstorm of stinging tentacles of how that would be worked out

If we ever work it out. And the voice came back at him  
Across the water, rubbing it the wrong way: "Thou  
Canst but undo the wrong thou hast done." The sackbuts  
Embarrass it, and we are never any closer to the collision

Of the waters, the peace of light drowning light,  
Grabbing it, holding it up streaming. It is all one. It lies  
All around, its new message, guilt, the admission  
Of guilt, your new act. Time buys

The receiver, the onlooker of the earlier system, but cannot  
Buy back the rest. It is night that fell  
At the edge of your footsteps as the music stopped.  
And we heard the bells for the first time. It is your chapter, I said.

## AND UT PICTURA POESIS IS HER NAME

You can't say it that way any more.  
Bothered about beauty you have to  
Come out into the open, into a clearing,  
And rest. Certainly whatever funny happens to you  
Is OK. To demand more than this would be strange  
Of you, you who have so many lovers,  
People who look up to you and are willing  
To do things for you, but you think  
It's not right, that if they really knew you . . .  
So much for self-analysis. Now,  
About what to put in your poem-painting:  
Flowers are always nice, particularly delphinium.  
Names of boys you once knew and their sleds,  
Skyrockets are good—do they still exist?  
There are a lot of other things of the same quality  
As those I've mentioned. Now one must  
Find a few important words, and a lot of low-keyed,  
Dull-sounding ones. She approached me  
About buying her desk. Suddenly the street was  
Bananas and the clangor of Japanese instruments.  
Humdrum testaments were scattered around. His head  
Locked into mine. We were a seesaw. Something  
Ought to be written about how this affects  
You when you write poetry:  
The extreme austerity of an almost empty mind  
Colliding with the lush, Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate  
Something between breaths, if only for the sake  
Of others and their desire to understand you and desert you  
For other centers of communication, so that understanding  
May begin, and in doing so be undone.

## *WHAT IS POETRY*

The medieval town, with frieze  
Of boy scouts from Nagoya? The snow

That came when we wanted it to snow?  
Beautiful images? Trying to avoid

Ideas, as in this poem? But we  
Go back to them as to a wife, leaving

The mistress we desire? Now they  
Will have to believe it

As we believe it. In school  
All the thought got combed out:

What was left was like a field.  
Shut your eyes, and you can feel it for miles around.

Now open them on a thin vertical path.  
It might give us—what?—some flowers soon?

## *AND OTHERS, VAGUER PRESENCES*

Are built out of the meshing of life and space  
At the point where we are wholly revealed  
In the lozenge-shaped openings. Because  
It is argued that these structures address themselves  
To exclusively aesthetic concerns, like windmills  
On a vast plain. To which it is answered  
That there are no other questions than these,  
Half squashed in mud, emerging out of the moment  
We all live, learning to like it. No sonnet  
On this furthest strip of land, no pebbles,

No plants. To extend one's life  
All day on the dirty stone of some plaza,  
Unaware among the pretty lunging of the wind,  
Light and shade, is like coming out of  
A coma that is a white, interesting country,  
Prepared to lose the main memory in a meeting  
By torchlight under the twisted end of the stairs.

## *THE WRONG KIND OF INSURANCE*

I teach in a high school  
And see the nurses in some of the hospitals,  
And if all teachers are like that  
Maybe I can give you a buzz some day,  
Maybe we can get together for lunch or coffee or something.

The white marble statues in the auditorium  
Are colder to the touch than the rain that falls  
Past the post-office inscription about rain or snow  
Or gloom of night. I think  
About what these archaic meanings mean,  
That unfurl like a rope ladder down through history,  
To fall at our feet like crocuses.

All of our lives is a rebus  
Of little wooden animals painted shy,  
Terrific colors, magnificent and horrible,  
Close together. The message is learned  
The way light at the edge of a beach in autumn is learned.  
The seasons are superimposed.  
In New York we have winter in August  
As they do in Argentina and Australia.  
Spring is leafy and cold, autumn pale and dry.  
And changes build up  
Forever, like birds released into the light  
Of an August sky, falling away forever  
To define the handful of things we know for sure,  
Followed by musical evenings.

Yes, friends, these clouds pulled along on invisible ropes  
Are, as you have guessed, merely stage machinery,  
And the funny thing is it knows we know  
About it and still wants us to go on believing  
In what it so unskillfully imitates, and wants

To be loved not for that but for itself;  
The murky atmosphere of a park, tattered  
Foliage, wise old tree trunks, rainbow tissue-paper wadded  
Clouds down near where the perspective  
Intersects the sunset, so we may know  
We too are somehow impossible, formed of so many  
different things,  
Too many to make sense to anybody.  
We straggle on as quotients, hard-to-combine  
Ingredients, and what continues  
Does so with our participation and consent.

Try milk of tears, but it is not the same.  
The dandelions will have to know why, and your comic  
Dirge routine will be lost on the unfolding sheaves  
Of the wind, a lucky one, though it will carry you  
Too far, to some manageable, cold, open  
Shore of sorrows you expected to reach,  
Then leave behind.

Thus, friend, this distilled,  
Dispersed musk of moving around, the product  
Of leaf after transparent leaf, of too many  
Comings and goings, visitors at all hours.  
Each night  
Is trifoliate, strange to the touch.

## FRIENDS

I like to speak in rhymes,  
because I am a rhyme myself.

NIJINSKY

I saw a cottage in the sky.  
I saw a balloon made of lead.  
*I cannot restrain my tears, and they fall*  
*On my left hand and on my silken tie,*  
*But I cannot and do not want to hold them back.*

One day the neighbors complain about an unpleasant odor  
Coming from his room. *I went for a walk*  
*But met no friends.* Another time I go outside  
Into the world. It rocks on and on.  
It was rocking before I saw it  
And is presumably doing so still.

The banker lays his hand on mine.  
His face is as clean as a white handkerchief.  
We talk nonsense as usual.  
I trace little circles on the light that comes in  
Through the window on saw-horse legs.  
Afterwards I see that we are three.  
Someone had entered the room while I was discussing my money  
problems.  
I wish God would put a stop to this. I  
Turn and see the new moon through glass. I am yanked away  
So fast I lose my breath, a not unpleasant feeling.

I feel as though I had been carrying the message for years  
On my shoulders like Atlas, never feeling it  
Because of never having known anything else. In another way  
I am involved with the message. I want to put it down  
(In two senses of "put it down") so that you

May understand the agreeable destiny that awaits us.  
You sigh. Your sighs will admit of no impatience,  
Only a vast crater lake, vast as the sea,  
In which the sky, smaller than that, is reflected.

I reach for my hat  
And am bound to repeat with tact  
The formal greeting I am charged with.  
No one makes mistakes. No one runs away  
Any more. I bite my lip and  
Turn to you. Maybe now you understand.

The feeling is a jewel like a pearl.

## THE ICE-CREAM WARS

Although I mean it, and project the meaning  
As hard as I can into its brushed-metal surface,  
It cannot, in this deteriorating climate, pick up  
Where I leave off. It sees the Japanese text  
(About two men making love on a foam-rubber bed)  
As among the most massive secretions of the human spirit.  
Its part is in the shade, beyond the iron spikes of the fence,  
Mixing red with blue. As the day wears on  
Those who come to seem reasonable are shouted down  
(*Why you old goat!* Look who's talkin'. Let's see you  
Climb off that tower—the waterworks architecture, both  
stupid and  
Grandly humorous at the same time, is a kind of mask for him,  
Like a seal's face. Time and the weather  
Don't always go hand in hand, as here: sometimes  
One is slanted sideways, disappears for awhile.  
Then later it's forget-me-not time, and rapturous  
Clouds appear above the lawn, and the rose tells  
The old old story, the pearl of the orient, occluded  
And still apt to rise at times.)

A few black smudges  
On the outer boulevards, like squashed midges  
And the truth becomes a hole, something one has always  
known,  
A heaviness in the trees, and no one can say  
Where it comes from, or how long it will stay—

A randomness, a darkness of one's own.

## BLUE SONATA

Long ago was the then beginning to seem like now  
As now is but the setting out on a new but still  
Undefined way. *That* now, the one once  
Seen from far away, is our destiny  
No matter what else may happen to us. It is  
The present past of which our features,  
Our opinions are made. We are half it and we  
Care nothing about the rest of it. We  
Can see far enough ahead for the rest of us to be  
Implicit in the surroundings that twilight is.  
We know that this part of the day comes every day  
And we feel that, as it has its rights, so  
We have our right to be ourselves in the measure  
That we are in it and not some other day, or in  
Some other place. The time suits us  
Just as it fancies itself, but just so far  
As we not give up that inch, breath  
Of becoming before becoming may be seen,  
Or come to seem all that it seems to mean now.

The things that were coming to be talked about  
Have come and gone and are still remembered  
As being recent. There is a grain of curiosity  
At the base of some new thing, that unrolls  
Its question mark like a new wave on the shore.  
In coming to give, to give up what we had,  
We have, we understand, gained or been gained  
By what was passing through, bright with the sheen  
Of things recently forgotten and revived.  
Each image fits into place, with the calm  
Of not having too many, of having just enough.  
We live in the sigh of our present.

If that was all there was to have  
We could re-imagine the other half, deducing it  
From the shape of what is seen, thus  
Being inserted into its idea of how we  
Ought to proceed. It would be tragic to fit  
Into the space created by our not having arrived yet,  
To utter the speech that belongs there,  
For progress occurs through re-inventing  
These words from a dim recollection of them,  
In violating that space in such a way as  
To leave it intact. Yet we do after all  
Belong here, and have moved a considerable  
Distance; our passing is a facade.  
But our understanding of it is justified.

## SYRINGA

Orpheus liked the glad personal quality  
Of the things beneath the sky. Of course, Eurydice was a part  
Of this. Then one day, everything changed. He rends  
Rocks into fissures with lament. Gullies, hummocks  
Can't withstand it. The sky shudders from one horizon  
To the other, almost ready to give up wholeness.  
Then Apollo quietly told him: "Leave it all on earth.  
Your lute, what point? Why pick at a dull pavan few care to  
Follow, except a few birds of dusty feather,  
Not vivid performances of the past." But why not?  
All other things must change too.  
The seasons are no longer what they once were,  
But it is the nature of things to be seen only once,  
As they happen along, bumping into other things, getting along  
Somehow. That's where Orpheus made his mistake.  
Of course Eurydice vanished into the shade;  
She would have even if he hadn't turned around.  
No use standing there like a gray stone toga as the whole wheel  
Of recorded history flashes past, struck dumb, unable to utter an  
intelligent  
Comment on the most thought-provoking element in its train.  
Only love stays on the brain, and something these people,  
These other ones, call life. Singing accurately  
So that the notes mount straight up out of the well of  
Dim noon and rival the tiny, sparkling yellow flowers  
Growing around the brink of the quarry, encapsulates  
The different weights of the things.  
But it isn't enough  
To just go on singing. Orpheus realized this  
And didn't mind so much about his reward being in heaven  
After the Bacchantes had torn him apart, driven  
Half out of their minds by his music, what it was doing to  
them.  
Some say it was for his treatment of Eurydice.

But probably the music had more to do with it, and  
The way music passes, emblematic  
Of life and how you cannot isolate a note of it  
And say it is good or bad. You must  
Wait till it's over. "The end crowns all,"  
Meaning also that the "tableau"  
Is wrong. For although memories, of a season, for example,  
Melt into a single snapshot, one cannot guard, treasure  
That stalled moment. It too is flowing, fleeting;  
It is a picture of flowing, scenery, though living, mortal,  
Over which an abstract action is laid out in blunt,  
Harsh strokes. And to ask more than this  
Is to become the tossing reeds of that slow,  
Powerful stream, the trailing grasses  
Playfully tugged at, but to participate in the action  
No more than this. Then in the lowering gentian sky  
Electric twitches are faintly apparent first, then burst forth  
Into a shower of fixed, cream-colored flares. The horses  
Have each seen a share of the truth, though each thinks,  
"I'm a maverick. Nothing of this is happening to me,  
Though I can understand the language of birds, and  
The itinerary of the lights caught in the storm is fully  
apparent to me.  
Their jousting ends in music much  
As trees move more easily in the wind after a summer storm  
And is happening in lacy shadows of shore-trees, now, day  
after day."

But how late to be regretting all this, even  
Bearing in mind that regrets are always late, too late!  
To which Orpheus, a bluish cloud with white contours,  
Replies that these are of course not regrets at all,  
Merely a careful, scholarly setting down of  
Unquestioned facts, a record of pebbles along the way.

And no matter how all this disappeared,  
Or got where it was going, it is no longer  
Material for a poem. Its subject  
Matters too much, and not enough, standing there helplessly  
While the poem streaked by, its tail afire, a bad  
Comet screaming hate and disaster, but so turned inward  
That the meaning, good or other, can never  
Become known. The singer thinks  
Constructively, builds up his chant in progressive stages  
Like a skyscraper, but at the last minute turns away.  
The song is engulfed in an instant in blackness  
Which must in turn flood the whole continent  
With blackness, for it cannot see. The singer  
Must then pass out of sight, not even relieved  
Of the evil burthen of the words. Stellification  
Is for the few, and comes about much later  
When all record of these people and their lives  
Has disappeared into libraries, onto microfilm.  
A few are still interested in them. "But what about  
So-and-so?" is still asked on occasion. But they lie  
Frozen and out of touch until an arbitrary chorus  
Speaks of a totally different incident with a similar name  
In whose tale are hidden syllables  
Of what happened so long before that  
In some small town, one indifferent summer.

From *FANTASIA ON*  
"THE NUT-BROWN MAID"

Unless this is the shelf of whatever happens? The cold sunrise attacks one side of the giant capital letters, bestirs a little the landmass as it sinks, grateful but asleep. And you too are a rebus from another century, your fiction in piles like lace, in that a new way of appreciating has been invented, that tomorrow will be quantitatively and qualitatively different— young love, cheerful, insubstantial things—and that these notions have been paraded before, though never with the flashing density climbing higher with you on the beanstalk until the jewelled mosaic of hills, ploughed fields and rivers agreed to be so studied and fell away forever, a gash of laughter, a sneeze of gold dust into the prism that weeps and remains solid.

Well had she represented the patient's history to his apathetic scrutiny. Always there was something to see, something going on, *for the historical past owed it to itself, our historical present*. There were visiting firemen, rumors of chattels on a spree, old men made up to look like young women in the polygon of night from which light sometimes breaks, to be sucked back, armies of foreigners who could not understand each other, the sickening hush just before the bleachers collapse, the inevitable uninvited and only guest who writes on the wall: I choose not to believe. It became a part of oral history. Things overheard in cafés assumed an importance previously reserved for letters from the front. The past was a dream of doctors and drugs. This wasn't misspent time. Oh, sometimes it'd seem like doing the same thing over and over, until I had passed beyond whatever the sense of it had been. Besides, hadn't it all ended a long time back, on some clear, washed-out afternoon, with a stiff breeze that seemed to shout: go back! For the moated past lives by these dreams of decorum that take into account any wisecracks made at their expense. It is not called living in a past. If history were only minding one's business, but, once under the gray shade of mist drawn across us . . . And who am I to speak this way, into a shoe? I know that evening is busy with lights, cars . . . That the curve will include me if I must stand here. My warm regards are cold, falling back to

the vase again like a fountain. Responsible to whom? I have chosen this environment and it is handsome: a festive ruching of bare twigs against the sky, masks under the balconies

that

I sing alway

From  
*AS*  
*WE*  
*KNOW*



## From *LITANY*

Some certified nut  
Will try to tell you it's poetry,  
(It's extraordinary, it makes a great deal of sense)  
But watch out or he'll start with some  
New notion or other and switch to both  
Leaving you wiser and not emptier though  
Standing on the edge of a hill.  
We have to worry  
About systems and devices there is no  
Energy here no spleen either  
We have to take over the sewer plans—  
Otherwise the coursing clear water, planes  
Upon planes of it, will have its day  
And disappear. Same goes for business:  
Holed up in some office skyscraper it's  
Often busy to predict the future for business plans  
But try doing it from down  
In the street and see how far it gets you! You  
Really have to sequester yourself to see  
How far you have come but I'm  
Not going to talk about that.

I'm fairly well pleased  
With the way you and I have come around the hill  
Ignoring and then anointing its edge even if  
We felt it keenly in the backwind.  
You were a secretary at first until it  
Came time to believe you and then the black man  
Replaced your headlights with fuel  
You seemed to grow from no place. And now,  
Calmed down, like a Corinthian column  
You grow and grow, scaling the high plinths  
Of the sky.

Others, the tenor, the doctor,  
 Want us to walk about on it to see how we feel  
 About it before they attempt anything, yet  
 In whose house are we? Must we not sit  
 Quietly, for we would not do this at home?  
 A splattering of trumpets against the very high  
 Pockmarked wall and a forgetting of spiny  
 Palm trees and it is over for us all,  
 Not just us, and yet on the inside it was  
 Doomed to happen again, over and over, like a  
 Wave on a beach, that thinks it's had this  
 Tremendous idea, coming to crash on the beach  
 Like that, and it's true, it has, yet  
 Others have gone before, and still others will  
 Follow, and far from undermining the spiciness  
 Of this individual act, this knowledge plants  
 A seed of eternal endeavor for fear of  
 Happening just once, and goes on this way,  
 And yet the originality should not deter  
 Our vision from the drain  
 That absorbs, night and day, all our equations,  
 Makes us brittle, emancipated, not men in a word.  
 Dying of fright  
 In the violet night you come to understand how it  
 Looked to the ancestors and what there was about it  
 That moved them and are come no closer  
 To the divine riddle which is aging,  
 So beautiful in the eternal honey of the sun  
 And spurs us on to a higher pitch  
 Of elocution that the company  
 Will not buy, and so back to our grandstand  
 Seat with the feeling of having mended  
 The contrary principles with the catgut  
 Of abstract sleek ideas that come only once in

The night to be born and are gone forever after  
Leaving their trace after the stitches have  
Been removed but who is to say they are  
Traces of what really went on and not  
'Today's palimpsest? For what  
Is remarkable about our chronic reverie (a watch  
That is always too slow or too fast)  
Is the lively sense of accomplishment that haloes it  
From afar. There is no need  
To approach closely, it will be done from here  
And work out better, you'll see.

So the giant slabs of material  
Came to be, and precious little else, and  
No information about them but that was all right  
For the present century. Later on  
We'd see how it might be in some other  
Epoch, but for the time being it was neither  
Your nor the population's concern, and may  
Have glittered as it declined but for now  
It would have to do, as any magic  
Is the right kind at the right time.  
There is no soothsaying  
Yet it happens in rows, windrows  
You call them in your far country.

But you are leaving:  
Some months ago I got an offer  
From Columbia Tape Club, Terre  
Haute, Ind., where I could buy one  
Tape and get another free. I accept-  
Ed the deal, paid for one tape and  
Chose a free one. But since I've been  
Repeatedly billed for my free tape.

I've written them several times but  
Can't straighten it out—would you  
Try?

## *SILHOUETTE*

Of how that current ran in, and turned  
In the climate of the indecent moment  
And became an act,  
I may not tell. The road  
Ran down there and was afterwards there  
So that no further borrowing  
Of criticism or the desire to add pleasure  
Was ever seen that way again.

In the blank mouths  
Of your oppressors, however, much  
Was seen to provoke. And the way  
Though discontinuous, and intermittent, sometimes  
Not heard of for years at a time, did,  
Nonetheless, move up, although, to his surprise  
It was inside the house,  
And always getting narrower.

There is no telling to what lengths,  
What mannerisms and fictitious subterranean  
Flowerings next to the cement he might have  
Been driven. But it all turned out another way.  
So cozy, so ornery, tempted always,  
Yet not thinking in his 1964 Ford  
Of the price of anything, the grapes, and her tantalizing touch  
So near that the fish in the aquarium  
Hung close to the glass, suspended, yet he never knew her  
Except behind the curtain. The catastrophe  
Buried in the stair carpet stayed there  
And never corrupted anybody.  
And one day he grew up, and the horizon  
Stammered politely. The sky was like muslin.  
And still in the old house no one ever answered the bell.

## MANY WAGONS AGO

At first it was as though you had passed,  
But then no, I said, he is still here,  
Forehead refreshed. A light is kindled. And  
Another. But no I said

Nothing in this wide berth of lights like weeds  
Stays to listen. Doubled up, fun is inside,  
The lair a surface compact with the night.  
It needs only one intervention,

A stitch, two, three, and then you see  
How it is all false equation planted with  
Enchanting blue shrubbery on each terrace  
That night produces, and they are backing up.

How easily we could spell if we could follow,  
Like thread looped through the eye of a needle,  
The grooves of light. It resists. But we stay behind, among them,  
The injured, the adored.

## AS WE KNOW

All that we see is penetrated by it—  
The distant treetops with their steeple (so  
Innocent), the stair, the windows' fixed flashing—  
Pierced full of holes by the evil that is not evil,  
The romance that is not mysterious, the life that is not life,  
A present that is elsewhere.

And further in the small capitulations  
Of the dance, you rub elbows with it,  
Finger it. That day you did it  
Was the day you had to stop, because the doing  
Involved the whole fabric, there was no other way to appear.  
You slid down on your knees  
For those precious jewels of spring water  
Planted on the moss, before they got soaked up  
And you teetered on the edge of this  
Calm street with its sidewalks, its traffic,

As though they are coming to get you.  
But there was no one in the noon glare,  
Only birds like secrets to find out about  
And a home to get to, one of these days.

The light that was shadowed then  
Was seen to be our lives,  
Everything about us that love might wish to examine,  
Then put away for a certain length of time, until  
The whole is to be reviewed, and we turned  
Toward each other, to each other.  
The way we had come was all we could see  
And it crept up on us, embarrassed  
That there is so much to tell now, really now.

## *OTHERWISE*

I'm glad it didn't offend me  
Not astral rain nor the unsponsored irresponsible musings

Of the soul where it exists  
To be fed and fussed over  
Are really what this trial is about.

It is meant to be the beginning  
Yet turns into anthems and bell ropes  
Swaying from landlocked clouds  
Otherwise into memories.

Which can't stand still and the progress  
Is permanent like the preordained bulk  
Of the First National Bank

Like fish sauce, but agreeable.

## *FLOWERING DEATH*

Ahead, starting from the far north, it wanders.  
Its radish-strong gasoline fumes have probably been  
Locked into your sinuses while you were away.  
You will have to deliver it.  
The flowers exist on the edge of breath, loose,  
Having been laid there.  
One gives pause to the other,  
Or there will be a symmetry about their movements  
Through which each is also an individual.

It is their collective blankness, however,  
That betrays the notion of a thing not to be destroyed.  
In this, how many facts we have fallen through  
And still the old façade glimmers there,  
A mirage, but permanent. We must first trick the idea  
Into being, then dismantle it,  
Scattering the pieces on the wind,  
So that the old joy, modest as cake, as wine and friendship  
Will stay with us at the last, backed by the night  
Whose ruse gave it our final meaning.

## HAUNTED LANDSCAPE

Something brought them here. It was an outcropping of peace  
In the blurred afternoon slope on which so many picnickers  
Had left no trace. The hikers then always passed through  
And greeted you silently. And down in one corner

Where the sweet william grew and a few other cheap plants  
The rhythm became strained, extenuated, as it petered out  
Among pots and watering cans and a trowel. There were no  
People now but everywhere signs of their recent audible passage.

She had preferred to sidle through the cane and he  
To hoe the land in the hope that some day they would grow happy  
Contemplating the result: so much fruitfulness. A legend.  
He came now in the certainty of her braided greeting,

Sunlight and shadow, and a great sense of what had been cast off  
Along the way, to arrive in this notch. Why were the insiders  
Secretly amused at their putting up handbills at night?  
By day hardly anyone came by and saw them.

They were thinking, too, that this was the right way to begin  
A farm that would later have to be uprooted to make way  
For the new plains and mountains that would follow after  
To be extinguished in turn as the ocean takes over

Where the glacier leaves off and in the thundering of surf  
And rock, something, some note or other, gets lost,  
And we have this to look back on, not much, but a sign  
Of the petty ordering of our days as it was created and led us

By the nose through itself, and now it has happened  
And we have it to look at, and have to look at it  
For the good it now possesses which has shrunk from the  
Outline surrounding it to a little heap or handful near the center.

Others call this old age or stupidity, and we, living  
In that commodity, know how only it can enchant the dear soul  
Building up dreams through the night that are cast down  
At the end with a graceful roar, like chimes swaying out over

The phantom village. It is our best chance of passing  
Unnoticed into the dream and all that the outside said about it,  
Carrying all that back to the source of so much that was precious.  
At one of the later performances you asked why they called  
it a "miracle,"

Since nothing ever happened. That, of course, was the  
miracle  
But you wanted to know why so much action took on so  
much life  
And still managed to remain itself, aloof, smiling and courteous.  
Is that the way life is supposed to happen? We'll probably  
never know

Until its cover turns into us: the eglantine for duress  
And long relativity, until it becomes a touch of red under the bridge  
At fixed night, and the cries of the wind are viewed as happy, salient.  
How could that picture come crashing off the wall when no one was in the  
room?

At least the glass isn't broken. I like the way the stars  
Are painted in this one, and those which are painted out.  
The door is opening. A man you have never seen enters the room.  
He tells you that it is time to go, but that you may stay,

If you wish. You reply that it is one and the same to you.  
It was only later, after the house had materialized elsewhere,  
That you remembered you forgot to ask him what form the change would  
take.

But it is probably better that way. Now time and the land are identical,

Linked forever.

## MY EROTIC DOUBLE

He says he doesn't feel like working today.  
It's just as well. Here in the shade  
Behind the house, protected from street noises,  
One can go over all kinds of old feeling,  
Throw some away, keep others.

The wordplay

Between us gets very intense when there are  
Fewer feelings around to confuse things.  
Another go-round? No, but the last things  
You always find to say are charming, and rescue me  
Before the night does. We are afloat  
On our dreams as on a barge made of ice,  
Shot through with questions and fissures of starlight  
That keep us awake, thinking about the dreams  
As they are happening. Some occurrence. You said it.

I said it but I can hide it. But I choose not to.  
Thank you. You are a very pleasant person.  
Thank you. You are too.

## *TRAIN RISING OUT OF THE SEA*

It is written in the Book of Usable Minutes  
That all things have their center in their dying,  
That each is discrete and diaphanous and  
Has pointed its prow away from the sand for the next trillion years.

After that we may be friends,  
Recognizing in each other the precedents that make us truly  
social.  
Do you hear the wind? It's not dying,  
It's singing, weaving a song about the president saluting the  
trust,

The past in each of us, until so much memory becomes an  
institution,  
Through sheer weight, the persistence of it, no,  
Not the persistence: that makes it seem a deliberate act  
Of duration, much too deliberate for this ingenuous being

Like an era that refuses to come to an end or be born again.  
We need more night for the sky, more blue for the daylight  
That inundates our remarks before we can make them  
Taking away a little bit of us each time

To be deposited elsewhere  
In the place of our involvement  
With the core that brought excessive flowering this year  
Of enormous sunsets and big breezes

That left you feeling too simple  
Like an island just off the shore, one of many, that no one  
Notices, though it has a certain function, though an abstract one  
Built to prevent you from being towed to shore.

## *LATE ECHO*

Alone with our madness and favorite flower  
We see that there really is nothing left to write about.  
Or rather, it is necessary to write about the same old things  
In the same way, repeating the same things over and over  
For love to continue and be gradually different.

Beehives and ants have to be reexamined eternally  
And the color of the day put in  
Hundreds of times and varied from summer to winter  
For it to get slowed down to the pace of an authentic  
Saraband and huddle there, alive and resting.

Only then can the chronic inattention  
Of our lives drape itself around us, conciliatory  
And with one eye on those long tan plush shadows  
That speak so deeply into our unprepared knowledge  
Of ourselves, the talking engines of our day.

*AND I'D LOVE YOU  
TO BE IN IT*

Playing alone, I found the wall.  
One side was gray, the other an indelible gray.  
The two sides were separated by a third,  
Or spirit wall, a coarser gray. The wall  
Was chipped and tarnished in places,  
Polished in places.

I wanted to put it behind me  
By walking beside it until it ended.  
This was never done. Meanwhile  
I stayed near the wall, touching the two ends.

With all of my power of living  
I am forced to lie on the floor.  
To have reached the cleansing end of the journey,  
Appearances put off forever, in my new life  
There is still no freedom, but excitement  
Turns in our throats like woodsmoke.

In what skyscraper or hut  
I'll finish? Today there are tendrils  
Coming through the slats, and milky, yellowy grapes,  
A mild game to divert the doorperson  
And we are swiftly inside, the resurrection finished.

## *TAPESTRY*

It is difficult to separate the tapestry  
From the room or loom which takes precedence over it.  
For it must always be frontal and yet to one side.

It insists on this picture of "history"  
In the making, because there is no way out of the punishment  
It proposes: sight blinded by sunlight.  
The seeing taken in with what is seen  
In an explosion of sudden awareness of its formal splendor.

The eyesight, seen as inner,  
Registers over the impact of itself  
Receiving phenomena, and in so doing  
Draws an outline, or a blueprint,  
Of what was just there: dead on the line.

If it has the form of a blanket, that is because  
We are eager, all the same, to be wound in it:  
This must be the good of not experiencing it.

But in some other life, which the blanket depicts anyway,  
The citizens hold sweet commerce with one another  
And pinch the fruit unpestered, as they will,  
As words go crying after themselves, leaving the dream  
Upended in a puddle somewhere  
As though "dead" were just another adjective.

## *A LOVE POEM*

And they have to get it right. We just need  
A little happiness, and when the clever things  
Are taken up (O has the mouth shaped that letter?  
What do we have bearing down on it?) as the last thin curve  
("Positively the last," they say) before the dark:  
(The sky is pure and faint, the pavement still wet) and

The dripping is in the walls, within sleep  
Itself. I mean there is no escape  
From me, from it. The night is itself sleep  
And what goes on in it, the naming of the wind,  
Our notes to each other, always repeated, always the same.

## *THIS CONFIGURATION*

This movie deals with the epidemic of the way we live now.  
What an inane cardplayer. And the age may support it.  
Each time the rumble of the age  
Is an anthill in the distance.

As he slides the first rumpled card  
Out of his dirty ruffled shirtfront the cartoon  
Of the new age has begun its ascent  
Around all of us like a gauze spiral staircase in which  
Some stars have been imbedded.

It is the modern trumpets  
Who decide the mood or tenor of this cross-section:  
Of the people who get up in the morning,  
Still half-asleep. That they shouldn't have fun.  
But something scary will come  
To get them anyway. You might as well linger  
On verandas, enjoying life, knowing  
The end is essentially unpredictable.  
It might be soldiers  
Marching all day, millions of them  
Past this spot, like the lozenge pattern  
Of these walls, like, finally, a kind of sleep.

Or it may be that we are ordinary people  
With not unreasonable desires which we can satisfy  
From time to time without causing cataclysms  
That keep getting louder and more forceful instead of dying  
away.

Or it may be that we and the other people  
Confused with us on the sidewalk have entered

A moment of seeming to be natural, expected,  
And we see ourselves at the moment we see them:  
Figures of an afternoon, of a century they extended.

## THEIR DAY

Each act of criticism is general  
But, in cutting itself off from all the others,  
Explicit enough.

We know how the criticism must be done  
On a specific day of the week. Too much matters  
About this day. Another day, and the criticism is thrown down  
Like trash into a dim, dusty courtyard.

It will be built again. That's all the point  
There is to it. And it is built,  
In sunlight, this time. All look up to it.  
It has changed. It is different. It is still  
Cut off from all the other acts of criticism.  
From this it draws a tragic strength. Its greatness.

They are constructing pleasure simultaneously  
In an adjacent chamber  
That occupies the same cube of space as the critic's study.  
For this to be pleasure, it must also be called criticism.

It is the very expensive kind  
That comes sealed in a bottle. It is music of the second night  
That winds up as if to say: Well, you've had it,  
And in doing so, you have it.

From these boxed perimeters  
We issue forth irregularly. Sometimes in fear,  
But mostly with no knowledge of knowing, only a general  
But selective feeling that the world had to go on being good to us.  
As long as we don't know that  
We can live at the square corners of the streets.  
The winter does what it can for its children.

## A TONE POEM

It is no longer night. But there is a sameness  
Of intention, all the same, in the ways  
We address it, rude  
Color of what an amazing world,  
As it goes flat, or rubs off, and this  
Is a marvel, we think, and are careful not to go past it.

But it is the same thing we are all seeing,  
Our world. Go after it,  
Go get it boy, says the man holding the stick.  
Eat, says the hunger, and we plunge blindly in again,  
Into the chamber behind the thought.  
We can hear it, even think it, but can't get disentangled  
from our brains.  
Here, I am holding the winning ticket. Over here.  
But it is all the same color again, as though the climate  
Dyed everything the same color. It's more practical,  
Yet the landscape, those billboards, age as rapidly as before.

## THE OTHER CINDY

A breeze came to the aid of that wilted day  
Where we sat about fuming at projects  
With the funds running out, and others  
Too simple and unheard-of to create pressure that moment,

Though it was one of these, lurking in the off-guard  
Secrecy of a mind like a magazine article, that kept  
Proposing, slicing, disposing, a truant idea even  
In that kingdom of the blind, that finally would have  
Reined in the mad hunt, quietly, and kept us there,  
Thinking, not especially dozing any more, until  
The truth had revealed itself the way a natural-gas  
Storage tank becomes very well known sometime after  
Dawn has slipped in  
And seems to have been visible all along  
Like a canoe route across the great lake on whose shore  
One is left trapped, grumbling not so much at bad luck as  
Because only this one side of experience is ever revealed.  
And that meant something.

Sure, there was more to it  
And the haunted houses in those valleys wanted to congratulate  
You on your immobility. Too often the adventurous acolyte  
Drops permanently from sight in this beautiful country.  
There is much to be said in favor of the danger of warding off danger  
But if you ever want to return

Though it seems improbable on the face of it  
You must master the huge retards and have faith in the slow  
Blossoming of haystacks, stairways, walls of convolvulus,  
Until the moon can do no more. Exhausted,  
You get out of bed. Your project is completed  
Though the experiment is a mess. Return the kit  
In the smashed cardboard box to the bright, bland

Cities that gave rise to you, you know  
The one with the big Woolworth's and postcard-blue sky.  
The contest ends at midnight tonight  
But you can submit again, and again.

*THE PLURAL OF*  
*"JACK-IN-THE-BOX"*

How quiet the diversion stands  
Beside my gate, and me all eager and no grace:  
Until tomorrow with sifting hands  
Unicode the sea that brought me to this place,  
Discover people with changing face  
But the way is wide over stubble and sands,  
Wider and not too wide, as a dish in space  
Is excellent, conforming to demands

Not yet formulated. Let certain trends  
Believe us, and that way give chase  
With hounds, and with the hare erase  
All knowledge of its coming here. The lands  
Are fewer now under the plain blue blanket whose  
Birthday keeps them outside at the end.

From  
*SHADOW*  
*TRAIN*



## *THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS*

It came about that there was no way of passing  
Between the twin partitions that presented  
A unified façade, that of a suburban shopping mall  
In April. One turned, as one does, to other interests

Such as the tides in the Bay of Fundy. Meanwhile there was one  
Who all unseen came creeping at this scale of visions  
Like the gigantic specter of a cat towering over tiny mice  
About to adjourn the town meeting due to the shadow,

An incisive shadow, too perfect in its outrageous  
Regularity to be called to stand trial again,  
That every blistered tongue welcomed as the first  
Drops scattered by the west wind, and yet, knowing

That it would always ever afterwards be this way  
Caused the eyes to faint, the ears to ignore warnings.  
We knew how to get by on what comes along, but the idea  
Warning, waiting there like a forest, not emptied, beckons.

## *PUNISHING THE MYTH*

At first it came easily, with the knowledge of the shadow line  
Picking its way through various landscapes before coming  
To stand far from you, to bless you incidentally  
In sorting out what was best for it, and most suitable,

Like snow having second thoughts and coming back  
To be wary about this, to embellish that, as though life were a party  
At which work got done. So we wiggled in our separate positions  
And stayed in them for a time. After something has passed

You begin to see yourself as you would look to yourself on a stage,  
Appearing to someone. But to whom? Ah, that's just it,  
To have the manners, and the look that comes from having a secret  
Isn't enough. But that "not enough" isn't to be worn like a livery,

To be briefly noticed, yet among whom should it be seen? I haven't  
Thought about these things in years; that's my luck.  
In time even the rocks will grow. And if you have curled and dandled  
Your innocence once too often, what attitude isn't then really yours?

## PARADOXES AND OXYMORONS

This poem is concerned with language on a very plain level.  
Look at it talking to you. You look out a window  
Or pretend to fidget. You have it but you don't have it.  
You miss it, it misses you. You miss each other.

The poem is sad because it wants to be yours, and cannot be.  
What's a plain level? It is that and other things,  
Bringing a system of them into play. Play?  
Well, actually, yes, but I consider play to be

A deeper outside thing, a dreamed role-pattern,  
As in the division of grace these long August days  
Without proof. Open-ended. And before you know it  
It gets lost in the steam and chatter of typewriters.

It has been played once more. I think you exist only  
To tease me into doing it, on your level, and then you aren't there  
Or have adopted a different attitude. And the poem  
Has set me softly down beside you. The poem is you.

## ANOTHER CHAIN LETTER

He had had it told to him on the sward  
Where the fat men bowl, and told so that no one—  
He least of all—might be sure in the days to come  
Of the *exact* terms. Then, each turned back

To his business, as is customary on such occasions.  
Months and months went by. The green squirearchy  
Of the dandelions was falling through the hoop again  
And no one, it seemed, had had the presence of mind

To initiate proceedings or stop the wheel  
From the number it was backing away from as it stopped:  
It was performing prettily; the puncture stayed unseen;  
The wilderness seemed to like the eclogue about it

You wrote and performed, but really no one now  
Saw any good in the cause, or any guilt. It was a conspiracy  
Of right-handed notions. Which is how we all  
Became partners in the pastoral doffing, the night we now knew.

## THE IVORY TOWER

Another season, proposing a name and a distant resolution.  
And, like the wind, all attention. Those thirsting ears,  
Climbers on what rickety heights, have swept you  
All alone into their confession, for it is as alone

Each of us stands and surveys this empty cell of time. Well,  
What is there to do? And so a mysterious creeping motion  
Quickens its demonic profile, bringing tears, to these eyes at least,  
Tears of excitement. When was the last time you *knew* that?

Yet in the textbooks thereof you keep getting mired  
In a backward innocence, although that too is something  
That must be owned, together with the rest.  
There is always some impurity. Help it along! Make room for it!

So that in the annals of this year be nothing but what is sobering:  
A porch built on pilings, far out over the sand. Then it doesn't  
Matter that the deaths come in the wrong order. All has been so easily  
Written about. And you find the right order after all: play, the streets,  
shopping, time flying.

## AT THE INN

It was me here. Though. And whether this  
Be rebus or me now, the way the grass is planted—  
Red stretching far out to the horizon—  
Surely prevails now. I shall return in the dark and be seen,

Be led to my own room by well-intentioned hands,  
Placed in a box with a lid whose underside is dark  
So as to grow, and shall grow  
Taller than plumes out on the ocean,

Grazing historically. And shall see  
The end of much learning, and other things  
Out of control and it ends too soon, before hanging up.  
So, laying his cheek against the dresser's wooden one,

He died making up stories, the ones  
Not every child wanted to listen to.  
And for a while it seemed that the road back  
Was a track bombarded by stubble like a snow.

## *THE ABSENCE OF A NOBLE PRESENCE*

If it was treason it was so well handled that it  
Became unimaginable. No, it was ambrosia  
In the alley under the stars and not this undiagnosable  
Turning, a shadow in the plant of all things

That makes us aware of certain moments,  
That the end is not far off since it will occur  
In the present and this is the present.  
No it was something not very subtle then and yet again

You've got to remember we don't see that much.  
We see a portion of caves dripping in the pastel book  
And are aware that everything doesn't count equally—  
There is dreaminess and infection in the sum

And since this too is of our everydays  
It matters only to the one you are next to  
This time, giving you a ride to the station.  
It foretells itself, not the hiccup you both notice.

## QUALM

Warren G. Harding invented the word "normalcy,"  
And the lesser-known "bloviate," meaning, one imagines,  
To spout, to spew aimless verbiage. He never wanted to be president.  
The "Ohio Gang" made him. He died in the Palace

Hotel in San Francisco, coming back from Alaska,  
As his wife was reading to him, about him,  
From *The Saturday Evening Post*. Poor Warren. He wasn't a bad egg,  
Just weak. He loved women and Ohio.

This protected summer of high, white clouds, a new golf star  
Flashes like confetti across the intoxicating early part  
Of summer, almost to the end of August. The crowd is hysterical:  
Fickle as always, they follow him to the edge

Of the inferno. But the fall is, deliciously, only his.  
They shall communicate this and that and compute  
Fixed names like "doorstep in the wind." The agony is permanent  
Rather than eternal. He'd have noticed it. Poor Warren.

## *HERE EVERYTHING IS STILL FLOATING*

But, it's because the liquor of summer nights  
Accumulates in the bottom of the bottle.  
Suspenders brought it to its, this, level, not  
The tempest in a teapot of a private asylum, laughter on the back steps,

Not mine, in fine; I must concentrate on how disappointing  
It all has to be while rejoicing in my singular  
Un-wholeness that keeps it an event to me. These, these young guys  
Taking a shower with the truth, living off the interest of their

Sublime receptivity to anything, can disentangle the whole  
Lining of fabricating living from the instantaneous  
Pocket it explodes in, enters the limelight of history from,  
To be gilded and regilded, waning as its legend waxes,

Disproportionate and triumphant. Still I enjoy  
The long sweetness of the simultaneity, yours and mine, ours and mine,  
The mosquitoey summer night light. Now about your poem  
Called this poem: it stays and must outshine its welcome.

## *SOME OLD TIRES*

This was mine, and I let it slip through my fingers.  
Nevertheless, I do not want, in this airy and pleasant city,  
To be held back by valors that were mine  
Only for the space of a dream instant, before continuing

To be someone else's. Because there's too much to  
Be done that doesn't fit, and the parts that get lost  
Are the reasonable ones just because they got lost  
And were forced to suffer transfiguration by finding their way home

To a forgotten spot way out in the fields. To have always  
Had the wind for a friend is no recommendation. Yet some  
Disagree, while still others claim that signs of fatigue  
And mended places are, these offshore days, open

And a symbol of what must continue  
After the ring is closed on us. The furniture,  
Taken out and examined under the starlight, pleads  
No contest. And the backs of those who sat there before,

## *SOMETHING SIMILAR*

I, the city mouse, have traveled from a long ways away  
To be with you with my news. Now you have my passport  
With its color photo in it, to be sweet with you  
As the times allow. I didn't say that because it's true,

I said it from a dim upstairs porch into the veiled  
Shapely masses of this country you are the geography of  
So you can put it in your wallet. That's all we can do  
For the time being. Elegance has been halted for the duration

And may not be resumed again. The bare hulk tells us  
Something, but mostly about what a strain it was to be brought  
To such a pass, and then abandoned. So we may never  
Again feel fully confident of the stratagem that bore us

And lived on a certain time after that. And it went away  
Little by little, as most things do. To profit  
By this mainstream is today's chore and adventure. He  
Who touches base first at dusk is possessed first, then wins.

## *OR IN MY THROAT*

To the poet as a basement quilt, but perhaps  
To some reader a latticework of regrets, through which  
You can see the funny street, with the ends of cars and the dust,  
The thing we always forget to put in. For him

The two ends were the same except that he was in one  
Looking at the other, and all his grief stemmed from that:  
There was no way of appreciating anything else, how polite  
People were for instance, and the dream, reversed, became

A swift nightmare of starlight on frozen puddles in some  
Dread waste. Yet you always hear  
How they are coming along. Someone always has a letter  
From one of them, asking to be remembered to the boys, and all.

That's why I quit and took up writing poetry instead.  
It's clean, it's relaxing, it doesn't squirt juice all over  
Something you were certain of a minute ago and now your own face  
Is a stranger and no one can tell you it's true. Hey, stupid!

## UNTILTED

How tall the buildings were as I began  
To live, and how high the rain that battered them!  
Why, coming down them, as I often did at night,  
Was a dream even before you reached the first gullies

And gave yourself over to thoughts of your own welfare.  
It was the tilt of the wine in the cavalier's tilted glass  
That documents so unerringly the faces and the mood in the room.  
One slip would not be fatal, but then this is not a win or lose

Situation, so involved with living in the past on the ridge  
Of the present, hearing its bells, breathing in its steam. . . .  
And the shuttle never falters, but to draw an encouraging conclusion  
From this would be considerable, too odd. Why not just

Breathe in with the courage of each day, recognizing yourself as one  
Who must with difficulty get down from high places? Forget  
The tourists—other people must travel too. It hurts now,  
Cradled in the bend of your arm, the pure tear, doesn't it?

## *THE LEASING OF SEPTEMBER*

The sleeping map lay green, and we who were never much  
To begin with, except for what the attractiveness of youth  
Contributed, stood around in the pastures of heaped-up, thickened  
White light, convinced that the story was coming to a close,

Otherwise why all these figurines, the Latin freemasonry in the corners?  
You stepped into a blue taxi, and as I swear my eyes were in keeping  
With the beauty of you as they saw it, so a swallow perpetuated  
In dove-gray dusk can be both the end and the exaltation of a new

Beginning, yet forever remain itself, as you  
Seem to run alongside me as the car picks up speed. Is it  
Your hand then? Will I always then return  
To the tier upon tier of cloth layered in the closet

Against what departure? Even a departure from the normal?  
So we are not recognized, under the metal. But to him  
The love was a solid object, like a partly unpacked trunk,  
As it was then, which is different now when remembered.

## *UNUSUAL PRECAUTIONS*

"We, we children, why our lives are circumscribed, circumferential;  
Close, too close to the center, we are haunted by perimeters  
And our lives seem to go in and out, in and out all the time,  
As though yours were diagonal, vertical, shallow, chopped off

At the root like the voice of the famous gadfly: 'Oh! Aho!' it  
Sits in the middle of the roadway. That's it. Worry and brown desk  
Stain it by infusion. There aren't enough tags at the end,  
And the grove is blind, blossoming, but we are too porous to hear it.

It's like watching a movie of a nightmare, the many episodes  
That defuse the thrust of what comes to us. The girl who juggled Indian  
clubs  
Belongs again to the paper space that backs the black  
Curtain, as though there were a reason to have paid for these seats.

Tomorrow you'll be walking in a white park. Our interests  
Are too close for us to see. There seems to be no  
Necessity for it, yet in walking, we too, around, and all around  
We'll come to one, where the street crosses your name, and feet run up it."

## *WE HESITATE*

The days to come are a watershed.  
You have to improve your portrait of God  
To make it plain. It is on the list,  
You and your bodies are on the line.

The new past now unfurls like a great somber hope  
Above the treeline, like a giant's hand  
Placed tentatively on the hurrying clouds.  
The basins come to be full and complex

But it is not enough. Concern and embarrassment  
Grow rank. Once they have come home there is no cursing.  
Fires disturb the evening. No one can hear the story.  
Or sometimes people just forget

Like a child. It took me months  
To get that discipline banned, and what is the use,  
To ban that? You remain a sane, yet sophisticated, person:  
Rooted in twilight, dreaming, a piece of traffic.

## FRONTISPIECE

Expecting rain, the profile of a day  
Wears its soul like a hat, prow up  
Against the deeply incised clouds and regions  
Of abrupt skidding from cold to cold, riddles

Of climate it cannot understand.  
Sometimes toward the end  
A look of longing broke, taut, from those eyes  
Meeting yours in final understanding, late,

And often, too, the beginnings went unnoticed  
As though the story could advance its pawns  
More discreetly thus, overstepping  
The confines of ordinary health and reason

To introduce in another way  
Its fact into the picture. It registered,  
It must be there. And so we turn the page over  
To think of starting. This is all there is.

## THE VEGETARIANS

In front of you, long tables leading down to the sun,  
A great gesture building. You accept it so as to play with it  
And translate when its attention is deflated for the one second  
Of eternity. Extreme patience and persistence are required,

Yet everybody succeeds at this before being handed  
The surprise box lunch of the rest of his life. But what is  
Truly startling is that it all happens modestly in the vein of  
True living, and then that too is translated into something

Floating up from it, signals that life flashed, weak but essential  
For uncorking the tone, and now lost, recently but forever.  
In Zurich everything was pure and purposeful, like the red cars  
Swung around the lake on wires, against the sky, then back down

Through the weather. Which resembles what you want to do  
No more than black tree trunks do, though you thought of it.  
Therefore our legends always come around to seeming legendary,  
A path decorated with our comings and goings. Or so I've been told.

From  
*A WAVE*



## *AT NORTH FARM*

Somewhere someone is traveling furiously toward you,  
At incredible speed, traveling day and night,  
Through blizzards and desert heat, across torrents, through narrow passes.  
But will he know where to find you,  
Recognize you when he sees you,  
Give you the thing he has for you?

Hardly anything grows here,  
Yet the granaries are bursting with meal,  
The sacks of meal piled to the rafters.  
The streams run with sweetness, fattening fish;  
Birds darken the sky. Is it enough  
That the dish of milk is set out at night,  
That we think of him sometimes,  
Sometimes and always, with mixed feelings?

## *THE SONGS WE KNOW BEST*

Just like a shadow in an empty room  
Like a breeze that's pointed from beyond the tomb  
Just like a project of which no one tells—  
Or didja really think that I was somebody else?

Your clothes and pantlegs lookin' out of shape  
Shape of the body over which they drape  
Body which has acted in so many scenes  
But didja ever think of what that body means?

It is an organ and a vice to some  
A necessary evil which we all must shun  
To others an abstraction and a piece of meat  
But when you're looking out you're in the driver's seat!

No man cares little about fleshly things  
They fill him with a silence that spreads in rings  
We wish to know more but we are never sated  
No wonder some folks think the flesh is overrated!

The things we know now all got learned in school  
Try to learn a new thing and you break the rule  
Our knowledge isn't much it's just a small amount  
But you feel it quick inside you when you're down for the count

You look at me and frown like I was out of place  
I guess I never did much for the human race  
Just hatched some schemes on paper that looked good at first  
Sat around and watched until the bubble burst

And now you're lookin' good all up and down the line  
Except for one thing you still have in mind  
It's always there though often with a different face  
It's the worm inside the jumping bean that makes it race

Too often when you thought you'd be showered with confetti  
What they flung at you was a plate of hot spaghetti  
You've put your fancy clothes and flashy gems in hock  
Yet you pause before your father's door afraid to knock

Once you knew the truth it tried to set you free  
And still you stood transfixed just like an apple tree  
The truth it came and went and left you in the lurch  
And now you think you see it from your lofty perch

The others come and go they're just a dime a dozen  
You react to them no more than to a distant cousin  
Only a few people can touch your heart  
And they too it seems have all gotten a false start

In twilight the city with its hills shines serene  
And lets you make of it more than anything could mean  
It's the same city by day that seems so crude and calm  
You'll have to get to know it not just pump its arm

Even when that bugle sounded loud and clear  
You knew it put an end to all your fear  
To all that lying and the senseless mistakes  
And now you've got it right and you know what it takes

Someday I'll look you up when we're both old and gray  
And talk about those times we had so far away  
How much it mattered then and how it matters still  
Only things look so different when you've got a will

It's true that out of this misunderstanding could end  
And men would greet each other like they'd found a friend  
With lots of friends around there's no one to entice  
And don't you think seduction isn't very nice?

It carries in this room against the painted wall  
And hangs in folds of curtains when it's not there at all  
It's woven in the flowers of the patterned spread  
And lies and knows not what it thinks upon the bed

I wish to come to know you get to know you all  
Let your belief in me and me in you stand tall  
Just like a project of which no one tells—  
Or do ya still think that I'm somebody else?

## *LANDSCAPE* (After Baudelaire)

I want a bedroom near the sky, an astrologer's cave  
Where I can fashion eclogues that are chaste and grave.  
Dreaming, I'll hear the wind in the steeples close by  
Sweep the solemn hymns away. I'll spy  
On factories from my attic window, resting my chin  
In both hands, drinking in the songs, the din.  
I'll see chimneys and steeples, those masts of the city,  
And the huge sky that makes us dream of eternity.

How sweet to watch the birth of the star in the still-blue  
Sky, through mist; the lamp burning anew  
At the window; rivers of coal climbing the firmament  
And the moon pouring out its pale enchantment.  
I'll see the spring, the summer and the fall  
And when winter casts its monotonous pall  
Of snow, I'll draw the blinds and curtains tight  
And build my magic palaces in the night;  
Then dream of gardens, of bluish horizons,  
Of jets of water weeping in alabaster basins,  
Of kisses, of birds singing at dawn and at nightfall,  
Of all that's most childish in our pastoral.  
When the storm rattles my windowpane  
I'll stay hunched at my desk, it will roar in vain  
For I'll have plunged deep inside the thrill  
Of conjuring spring with the force of my will,  
Coaxing the sun from my heart, and building here  
Out of my fiery thoughts, a tepid atmosphere.

## *JUST WALKING AROUND*

What name do I have for you?  
Certainly there is no name for you  
In the sense that the stars have names  
That somehow fit them. Just walking around,

An object of curiosity to some,  
But you are too preoccupied  
By the secret smudge in the back of your soul  
To say much, and wander around,

Smiling to yourself and others.  
It gets to be kind of lonely  
But at the same time off-putting,  
Counterproductive, as you realize once again

That the longest way is the most efficient way,  
The one that looped among islands, and  
You always seemed to be traveling in a circle.  
And now that the end is near

The segments of the trip swing open like an orange.  
There is light in there, and mystery and food.  
Come see it. Come not for me but it.  
But if I am still there, grant that we may see each other.

## THE ONGOING STORY

I could say it's the happiest period of my life.  
It hasn't got much competition! Yesterday  
It seemed a flatness, hotness. As though it barely stood out  
From the rocks of all the years before. Today it sheds  
That old name, without assuming any new one. I think it's still there.

It was as though I'd been left with the empty street  
A few seconds after the bus pulled out. A dollop of afternoon wind.  
Others tell you to take your attention off it  
For awhile, refocus the picture. Plan to entertain,  
To get out. (Do people really talk that way?)

We could pretend that all that isn't there never existed anyway.  
The great ideas? What good are they if they're misplaced,  
In the wrong order, if you can't remember one  
At the moment you're so to speak mounting the guillotine  
Like Sydney Carton, and can't think of anything to say?  
Or is this precisely material covered in a course  
Called Background of the Great Ideas, and therefore it isn't necessary  
To say anything or even know anything? The breath of the moment  
Is breathed, we fall and still feel better. The phone rings,

It's a wrong number, and your heart is lighter,  
Not having to be faced with the same boring choices again  
Which doesn't undermine a feeling for people in general and  
Especially in particular: you,  
In your deliberate distinctness, whom I love and gladly  
Agree to walk blindly into the night with,  
Your realness is real to me though I would never take any of it  
Just to see how it grows. A knowledge that people live close by is,  
I think, enough. And even if only first names are ever exchanged  
The people who own them seem rock-true and marvelously self-sufficient

## THANK YOU FOR NOT COOPERATING

Down in the street there are ice-cream parlors to go to  
And the pavement is a nice, bluish slate-gray. People laugh a lot.  
Here you can see the stars. Two lovers are singing  
Separately, from the same rooftop: "*Leave your change behind,*  
*Leave your clothes, and go. It is time now.*  
It was time before too, but now it is really time.  
You will never have enjoyed storms so much  
As on these hot sticky evenings that are more like August  
Than September. Stay. A fake wind wills you to go  
And out there on the stormy river witness buses bound for Connecticut,  
And tree-business, and all that we think about when we stop thinking.  
The weather is perfect, the season unclear. Weep for your going  
But also expect to meet me in the near future, when I shall disclose  
New further adventures, and that you shall continue to think of me."

The wind dropped, and the lovers  
Sang no more, communicating each to each in the tedium  
Of self-expression, and the shore curled up and became liquid  
And so the celebrated lament began. And how shall we, people  
All unused to each other and to our own business, explain  
It to the shore if it is given to us  
To circulate there "in the near future" the why of our coming  
And why we were never here before? The counterproposals  
Of the guest-stranger impede our construing of ourselves as  
Person-objects, the ones we knew would get here  
Somehow, but we can remember as easily as the day we were born  
The maggots we passed on the way and how the day bled  
And the night too on hearing us, though we spoke only our childish  
Ideas and never tried to impress anybody even when somewhat older.

## *MORE PLEASANT ADVENTURES*

The first year was like icing.  
Then the cake started to show through.  
Which was fine, too, except you forget the direction you're taking.  
Suddenly you are interested in some new thing  
And can't tell how you got here. Then there is confusion  
Even out of happiness, like a smoke—  
The words get heavy, some topple over, you break others.  
And outlines disappear once again.

Heck, it's anybody's story,  
A sentimental journey—"gonna take a sentimental journey,"  
And we do, but you wake up under the table of a dream:  
You are that dream, and it is the seventh layer of you.  
We haven't moved an inch, and everything has changed.  
We are somewhere near a tennis court at night.  
We get lost in life, but life knows where we are.  
We can always be found with our associates.  
Haven't you always wanted to curl up like a dog and go to sleep like a dog?

In the rash of partings and dyings (the new twist),  
There's also room for breaking out of living.  
Whatever happens will be quite ingenious.  
No acre but will resume being disputed now,  
And paintings are one thing we never seem to run out of.

## *PURISTS WILL OBJECT*

We have the looks you want:

The gonzo (musculature seemingly wired to the stars);

Colors like lead, khaki and pomegranate; things you

Put in your hair, with the whole panoply of the past:

Landscape embroidery, complete sets of this and that.

It's bankruptcy, the human haul,

The shining, bulging nets lifted out of the sea, and always a few refugees

Dropping back into the no-longer-mirthful kingdom

On the day someone sells an old house

And someone else begins to add on to his: all

In the interests of this pornographic masterpiece,

Variegated, polluted skyscraper to which all gazes are drawn,

Pleasure we cannot and will not escape.

It seems we were going home.

The smell of blossoming privet blanketed the narrow avenue.

The traffic lights were green and aqueous.

So this is the subterranean life.

If it can't be conjugated onto us, what good is it?

What need for purists when the demotic is built to last,

To outlast us, and no dialect hears us?

### 37 *HAIKU*

Old-fashioned shadows hanging down, that difficulty in love too soon  
Some star or other went out, and you, thank you for your book and year  
Something happened in the garage and I owe it for the blood traffic  
Too low for nettles but it is exactly the way people think and feel  
And I think there's going to be even more but waist-high  
Night occurs dimmer each time with the pieces of light smaller and squarer  
You have original artworks hanging on the walls oh I said edit  
You nearly undermined the brush I now place against the ball field arguing  
That love was a round place and will still be there two years from now  
And it is a dream sailing in a dark unprotected cove  
Pirates imitate the ways of ordinary people myself for instance  
Planted over and over that land has a bitter aftertaste  
A blue anchor grains of grit in a tall sky sewing  
He is a monster like everyone else but what do you do if you're a monster  
Like him feeling him come from far away and then go down to his car  
The wedding was enchanted everyone was glad to be in it  
What trees, tools, why ponder socks on the premises

Come to the edge of the barn the property really begins there  
In a smaller tower shuttered and put away there  
You lay aside your hair like a book that is too important to read now  
Why did witches pursue the beast from the eight sides of the country  
A pencil on glass—shattered! The water runs down the drain  
In winter sometimes you see those things and also in summer  
A child must go down it must stand and last  
Too late the last express passes through the dust of gardens  
A vest—there is so much to tell about even in the side rooms  
Hesitantly, it built up and passed quickly without unlocking  
There are some places kept from the others and are separate, they never exist  
I lost my ridiculous accent without acquiring another  
In Buffalo, Buffalo she was praying, the nights stick together like pages in an  
old book  
The dreams descend like cranes on gilded, forgetful wings  
What is the past, what is it all for? A mental sandwich?  
Did you say, hearing the schooner overhead, we turned back to the weir?

In rags and crystals, sometimes with a shred of sense, an odd dignity  
The boy must have known the particles fell through the house after him  
All in all we were taking our time, the sea returned—no more pirates  
I inch and only sometimes as far as the twisted pole gone in spare colors

## THE LONEDALE OPERATOR

The first movie I ever saw was the Walt Disney cartoon *The Three Little Pigs*. My grandmother took me to it. It was back in the days when you went "downtown." There was a second feature, with live actors, called *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, a documentary about the explorer Frank Buck. In this film you saw a python swallow a live pig. This wasn't scary. In fact, it seemed quite normal, the sort of thing you *would* see in a movie—"reality."

A little later we went downtown again to see a movie of *Alice in Wonderland*, also with live actors. This wasn't very surprising either. I think I knew something about the story; maybe it had been read to me. That wasn't why it wasn't surprising, though. The reason was that these famous movie actors, like W. C. Fields and Gary Cooper, were playing different roles, and even though I didn't know who they were, they were obviously important for doing other kinds of acting, and so it didn't seem strange that they should be acting in a special way like this, pretending to be characters that people already knew about from a book. In other words, I imagined specialties for them just from having seen this one example. And I was right, too, though not about the film, which I liked. Years later I saw it when I was grown up and thought it was awful. How could I have been wrong the first time? I knew it wasn't inexperience, because somehow I was experienced the first time I saw a movie. It was as though my taste had changed, though I had not, and I still can't help feeling that I was right the first time, when I was still relatively unencumbered by my experience.

I forget what were the next movies I saw and will skip ahead to one I saw when I was grown up, *The Lonedale Operator*, a silent short by D. W. Griffith, made in 1911 and starring Blanche Sweet. Although I was in my twenties when I saw it at the Museum of Modern Art, it seems as remote from me in time as my first viewing of *Alice in Wonderland*. I can remember almost none of it, and the little I can remember may have been in another Griffith short, *The Lonely Villa*, which may have been on the same program. It seems that Blanche Sweet was a heroic telegraph operator who managed to get through to the police and foil some gangsters who were trying to rob a railroad depot, though I also see this living room—small, though it was supposed to be in a large house—with Mary Pickford running around, and

this may have been a scene in *The Lonely Villa*. At that moment the memories stop, and terror, or tedium, sets in. It's hard to tell which is which in this memory, because the boredom of living in a lonely place or having a lonely job, and even of being so far in the past and having to wear those funny uncomfortable clothes and hairstyles is terrifying, more so than the intentional scariness of the plot, the criminals, whoever they were.

Imagine that innocence (Lilian Harvey) encounters romance (Willy Fritsch) in the home of experience (Albert Basserman). From there it is only a step to terror, under the dripping boughs outside. Anything can change as fast as it wants to, and in doing so may pass through a more or less terrible phase, but the true terror is in the swiftness of changing, forward or backward, slipping always just beyond our control. The actors are like people on drugs, though they aren't doing anything unusual—as a matter of fact, they are performing brilliantly.

## *DARLENE'S HOSPITAL*

The hospital: it wasn't her idea  
That the colors should slide muddy from the brush  
And spew their random evocations everywhere,  
Provided that things should pick up next season.  
It was a way of living, to her way of thinking.  
She took a job, it wasn't odd.  
But then, backing through the way many minds had been made up,  
It came again, the color, always a color  
Climbing the apple of the sky, often  
A secret lavender place you weren't supposed to look into.  
And then a sneeze would come along  
Or soon we'd be too far out from shore, on a milky afternoon  
Somewhere in late August with the paint flaking off,  
The lines of traffic flowing like mucus.  
And they won't understand its importance, it's too bad,  
Not even when it's too late.

Now we're often happy. The dark car  
Moves heftily away along low bluffs,  
And if we don't have our feelings, what  
Good are we, but whose business is it?  
Beware the happy man: once she perched light  
In the reading space of my room, a present joy  
For all time to come, whatever happens;  
And still we rotate, gathering speed until  
Nothing is there but more speed in the light ahead.  
Such moments as we prized in life:  
The promise of a new day, living with lots of people  
All headed in more or less the same direction, the sound of this  
In the embracing stillness, but not the brutality,  
And lists of examples of lots of things, and shit—  
What more could we conceivably be satisfied with, it is  
Joy, and undaunted

She leaves the earth at that point,  
Intersecting all our daydreams of breakfast and lunch,  
The Lady of Shalott's in hot water again.

This and the dreams of any of the young  
Were not her care. The river flowed  
Hard by the hospital from whose gilded  
Balconies and turrets fair spirits waved,  
Lonely, like us. Here be no pursuers,  
Only imagined animals and cries  
In the wilderness, which made it "the wilderness,"  
And suddenly the lonesomeness becomes a pleasant city  
Fanning out around a lake; you get to meet  
Precisely the person who would have been here now,  
A dream no longer, and are polished and directed  
By his deliberate grasp, back  
To the reality that was always there despairing  
Of your return as months and years went by,  
Now silent again forever, the perfect space,  
Attuned to your wristwatch  
As though time would never go away again.

His dirty mind  
Produced it all, an oratorio based on love letters  
About our sexual habits in the early 1950s.  
It wasn't that these stories weren't true,  
Only that a different kind of work  
Of the imagination had grown up around them, taller  
Than redwoods, and not  
Wanting to embarrass them, effaced itself  
To the extent that a colossus could, and so you looked  
And saw nothing, but suddenly felt better  
Without wondering why. And the serial continues:

Pain, expiation, delight, more pain,  
A frieze that lengthens continually, in the lucky way  
Friezes do, and no plot is produced,  
Nothing you could hang an identifying question on.  
It's an imitation of pleasure; it may not work  
But at least we'll know then that we'll have done  
What we could, and chalk it up to virtue  
Or just plain laziness. And if she glides  
Backwards through us, a finger hooked  
Out of death, we shall not know where the mystery began:  
Inaccurate dreamers of our state,  
Sodden from sitting in the rain too long.

## WHATEVER IT IS, WHEREVER YOU ARE

The cross-hatching technique which allowed our ancestors to exchange certain genetic traits for others, in order to provide their offspring with a way of life at once more variegated and more secure than their own, has just about run out of steam and has left us wondering, once more, what there is about this plush solitude that makes us think we will ever get out, or even want to. The ebony hands of the clock always seem to mark the same hour. That is why it always seems the same, though it is of course changing constantly, subtly, as though fed by an underground stream. If only we could go out in back, as when we were kids, and smoke and fool around and just stay out of the way, for a little while. But that's just it—don't you see? We are "out in back." No one has ever used the front door. We have always lived in this place without a name, without shame, a place for grownups to talk and laugh, having a good time. When we were children it seemed that adulthood would be like climbing a tree, that there would be a view from there, breathtaking because slightly more elusive. But now we can see only down, first down through the branches and further down the surprisingly steep grass patch that slopes away from the base of the tree. It certainly is a different view, but not the one we expected.

What did *they* want us to do? Stand around this way, monitoring every breath, checking each impulse for the return address, wondering constantly about evil until necessarily we fall into a state of torpor that is probably the worst sin of all? To what purpose did they cross-hatch so effectively, so that the luminous surface that was underneath is transformed into another, also luminous but so shifting and so alive with suggestiveness that it is like quicksand, to take a step there would be to fall through the fragile net of uncertainties into the bog of certainty, otherwise known as the Slough of Despond?

Probably they meant for us to enjoy the things they enjoyed, like late summer evenings, and hoped that we'd find others and thank them for providing us with the wherewithal to find and enjoy them. Singing the way they did, in the old time, we can sometimes see through the tissues and tracings the genetic process has laid down between us and them. The

tendrils can suggest a hand, or a specific color—the yellow of the tulip, for instance—will flash for a moment in such a way that after it has been withdrawn we can be sure that there was no imagining, no auto-suggestion here, but at the same time it becomes as useless as all subtracted memories. It has brought certainty without heat or light. Yet still in the old time, in the faraway summer evenings, they must have had a word for this, or known that we would someday need one, and wished to help. Then it is that a kind of purring occurs, like the wind sneaking around the baseboards of a room: not the infamous “still, small voice” but an ancillary speech that is parallel to the slithering of our own doubt-fleshed imaginings, a visible soundtrack of the way we sound as we move from encouragement to despair to exasperation and back again, with a gesture sometimes that is like an aborted movement outward toward some cape or promontory from which the view would extend in two directions—backward and forward—but that is only a polite hope in the same vein as all the others, crumpled and put away, and almost not to be distinguished from any of them, except that *it knows we know*, and in the context of not knowing is a fluidity that flashes like silver, that seems to say a film has been exposed and an image will, most certainly will, not like the last time, come to consider itself within the frame.

It must be an old photograph of you, out in the yard, looking almost afraid in the crisp, raking light that afternoons in the city held in those days, unappeased, not accepting anything from anybody. So what else is new? I'll tell you what is: you are accepting this now from the invisible, unknown sender, and the light that was intended, you thought, only to rake or glance is now directed full in your face, as it in fact always was, but you were squinting so hard, fearful of accepting it, that you didn't know this. Whether it warms or burns is another matter, which we will not go into here. The point is that you are accepting it and holding on to it, like love from someone you always thought you couldn't stand, and whom you now recognize as a brother, an equal. Someone whose face is the same as yours in the photograph but who is someone else, all of whose thoughts and feelings are directed at you, falling like a gentle slab of light that will ultimately loosen and dissolve the crusted suspicion, the timely self-hatred,

the efficient cold directness, the horrible good manners, the sensible resolves and the senseless nights spent waiting in utter abandon, that have grown up to be you in the tree with no view; and place you firmly in the good-natured circle of your ancestors' games and entertainments.

## A WAVE

To pass through pain and not know it,  
A car door slamming in the night,  
To emerge on an invisible terrain.

So the luck of speaking out  
A little too late came to be worshipped in various guises:  
A mute actor, a future saint intoxicated with the idea of martyrdom;  
And our landscape came to be as it is today:  
Partially out of focus, some of it too near, the middle distance  
A haven of serenity and unreachable, with all kinds of nice  
People and plants waking and stretching, calling  
Attention to themselves with every artifice of which the human  
Genre is capable. And they called it our home.

No one came to take advantage of these early  
Reverses, no doorbell rang;  
Yet each day of the week, once it had arrived, seemed the threshold  
Of love and desperation again. At night it sang  
in the black trees: *My mindless, oh my mindless, oh.*  
And it could be that it was Tuesday, with dark, restless clouds  
And puffs of white smoke against them, and below, the wet streets  
That seem so permanent, and all of a sudden the scene changes:  
It's another idea, a new conception, something submitted  
A long time ago, that only now seems about to work  
To destroy at last the ancient network  
Of letters, diaries, ads for civilization.  
It passes through you, emerges on the other side  
And is now a distant city, with all  
The possibilities shrouded in a narrative moratorium.  
The chroniqueurs who bad-mouthed it, the honest  
Citizens whose going down into the day it was,  
Are part of it, though none  
Stand with you as you mope and thrash your way through time,

Imagining it as it is, a kind of tragic euphoria  
In which your spirit sprouted. And which is justified in you.

In the haunted house no quarter is given: in that respect  
It's very much business as usual. The reductive principle  
Is no longer there, or isn't enforced as much as before.  
There will be no getting away from the prospector's  
Hunch; past experience matters again; the tale will stretch on  
For miles before it is done. There would be more concerts  
From now on, and the ground on which a man and his wife could  
Look at each other and laugh, remembering how love is to them,  
Shrank and promoted a surreal intimacy, like jazz music  
Moving over furniture, to say how pleased it was  
Or something. In the end only a handshake  
Remains, something like a kiss, but fainter. Were we  
Making sense? Well, that thirst will account for some  
But not all of the marvelous graffiti; meanwhile  
The oxygen of the days sketches the rest,  
The balance. Our story is no longer alone.  
There is a rumbling there  
And now it ends, and in a luxurious hermitage  
The straws of self-defeat are drawn. The short one wins.

One idea is enough to organize a life and project it  
Into unusual but viable forms, but many ideas merely  
Lead one thither into a morass of their own good intentions.  
Think how many the average person has during the course of a day, or night,  
So that they become a luminous backdrop to ever-repeated  
Gestures, having no life of their own, but only echoing  
The suspicions of their possessor. It's fun to scratch around  
And maybe come up with something. But for the tender blur  
Of the setting to mean something, words must be ejected bodily,  
A certain crispness be avoided in favor of a density  
Of strutted opinion doomed to wilt in oblivion: not too linear

Nor yet too puffed and remote. Then the advantage of  
Sinking in oneself, crashing through the skylight of one's own  
Received opinions redirects the maze, setting up significant  
Erections of its own at chosen corners, like gibbets,  
And through this the mesmerizing plan of the landscape becomes,  
At last, apparent. It is no more a landscape than a golf course is,  
Though sensibly a few natural bonuses have been left in. And as it  
Focuses itself, it is the backward part of a life that is  
Partially coming into view. It's there, like a limb. And the issue  
Of making sense becomes such a far-off one. Isn't this "sense"—  
This little of my life that I can see—that answers me  
Like a dog, and wags its tail, though excitement and fidelity are  
About all that ever gets expressed? What did I ever do  
To want to wander over into something else, an explanation  
Of how I behaved, for instance, when knowing can have this  
Sublime rind of excitement, like the shore of a lake in the desert  
Blazing with the sunset? So that if it pleases all my constructions  
To collapse, I shall at least have had that satisfaction, and known  
That it need not be permanent in order to stay alive,  
Beaming, confounding with the spell of its good manners.

As with rocks at low tide, a mixed surface is revealed,  
More detritus. Still, it is better this way  
Than to have to live through a sequence of events acknowledged  
In advance in order to get to a primitive statement. And the mind  
Is the beach on which the rocks pop up, just a neutral  
Support for them in their indignity. They explain  
The trials of our age, cleansing it of toxic  
Side-effects as it passes through their system.  
Reality. Explained. And for seconds  
We live in the same body, are a sibling again.

I think all games and disciplines are contained here,  
Painting, as they go, dots and asterisks that

We force into meanings that don't concern us  
And so leave us behind. But there are no fractions, the world is an integer  
Like us, and like us it can neither stand wholly apart nor disappear.  
When one is young it seems like a very strange and safe place,  
But now that I have changed it feels merely odd, cold  
And full of interest. The sofa that was once a seat  
Puzzles no longer, while the sweet conversation that occurs  
At regular intervals throughout the years is like a collie  
One never outgrows. And it happens to you  
In this room, it is here, and we can never  
Eat of the experience. It drags us down. Much later on  
You thought you perceived a purpose in the game at the moment  
Another player broke one of the rules; it seemed  
A module for the wind, something in which you lose yourself  
And are not lost, and then it pleases you to play another day  
When outside conditions have changed and only the game  
Is fast, perplexed and true, as it comes to have seemed.

Yet one does know why. The covenant we entered  
Bears down on us, some are ensnared, and the right way,  
It turns out, is the one that goes straight through the house  
And out the back. By so many systems  
As we are involved in, by just so many  
Are we set free on an ocean of language that comes to be  
Part of us, as though we would ever get away.  
The sky is bright and very wide, and the waves talk to us,  
Preparing dreams we'll have to live with and use. The day will come  
When we'll have to. But for now  
They're useless, more trees in a landscape of trees.

I hadn't expected a glance to be that direct, coming from a sculpture  
Of moments, thoughts added on. And I had kept it  
Only as a reminder, not out of love. In time I moved on  
To become its other side, and then, gentle, anxious, I became as a parent

To those scenes lifted from "real life." There was the quiet time  
In the supermarket, and the pieces  
Of other people's lives as they sashayed or tramped past  
My own section of a corridor, not pausing  
In many cases to wonder where they were—maybe they even knew.  
True, those things or moments of which one  
Finds oneself an enthusiast, a promoter, are few,  
But they last well,  
Yielding up their appearances for form  
Much later than the others. Forgetting about "love"  
For a moment puts one miles ahead, on the steppe or desert  
Whose precise distance as it feels I  
Want to emphasize and estimate. Because  
We will all have to walk back this way  
A second time, and not to know it then, not  
To number each straggling piece of sagebrush  
Is to sleep before evening, and well into the night  
That always coaxes us out, smooths out our troubles and puts us back to  
bed again.

All those days had a dumb clarity that was about getting out  
Into a remembered environment. The headlines and economy  
Would refresh for a moment as you look back over the heap  
Of rusted box-springs with water under them, and then,  
Like sliding up to a door or a peephole a tremendous advantage  
Would burst like a bubble. Toys as solemn and knotted as books  
Assert themselves first, leading down through a delicate landscape  
Of reminders to be better next time to a damp place on my hip,  
And this would spell out a warm business letter urging us  
All to return to our senses, to the matter of the day  
That was ending now. And no special sense of decline ensued  
But perhaps a few moments of music of such tact and weariness  
That one awakens with a new sense of purpose: more things to be done  
And the just-sufficient tools to begin doing them

While awaiting further orders that must materialize soon  
Whether in the sand-pit with frightened chickens running around  
Or on a large table in a house deep in the country with messages  
Pinned to the walls and a sense of plainness quite unlike  
Any other waiting. I am prepared to deal with this  
While putting together notes related to the question of love  
For the many, for two people at once, and for myself  
In a time of need unlike those that have arisen so far.  
And some day perhaps the discussion that has to come  
In order for us to start feeling any of it before we even  
Start to think about it will arrive in a new weather  
Nobody can imagine but which will happen just as the ages  
Have happened without causing total consternation,  
Will take place in a night, long before sleep and the love  
That comes then, breathing mystery back into all the sterile  
Living that had to lead up to it. Moments as clear as water  
Splashing on a rock in the sun, though in darkness, and then  
Sleep has to affirm it and the body is fresh again,  
For the trials and dangerous situations that any love,  
However well-meaning, has to use as terms in the argument  
That is the reflexive play of our living and being lost  
And then changed again, a harmless fantasy that must grow  
Progressively serious, and soon state its case succinctly  
And dangerously, and we sit down to the table again  
Noting the grain of the wood this time and how it pushes through  
The pad we are writing on and becomes part of what is written.  
Not until it starts to stink does the inevitable happen.

Moving on we approached the top  
Of the thing, only it was dark and no one could see,  
Only somebody said it was a miracle we had gotten past the  
Previous phase, now faced with each other's conflicting  
Wishes and the hope for a certain peace, so this would be  
Our box and we would stay in it for as long

As we found it comfortable, for the broken desires  
Inside were as nothing to the steeply shelving terrain outside,  
And morning would arrange everything. So my first impulse  
Came, stayed awhile, and left, leaving behind  
Nothing of itself, no whisper. The days now move  
From left to right and back across this stage and no one  
Notices anything unusual. Meanwhile I have turned back  
Into that dream of rubble that was the city of our starting out.  
No one advises me; the great tenuous clouds of the desert  
Sky visit it and they barely touch, so pleasing in the  
Immense solitude are the tracks of those who wander and continue  
On their route, certain that day will end soon and that night will then fall.

But behind what looks like heaps of slag the peril  
Consists in explaining everything too evenly. Those  
Suffering from the blahs are unlikely to notice that the topic  
Of today's lecture doesn't exist yet, and in their trauma  
Will become one with the vast praying audience as it sways and bends  
To the rhythm of an almost inaudible piccolo. And when  
It is flushed out, the object of all this meditation will not  
Infrequently turn out to be a mere footnote to the great chain  
That manages only with difficulty to connect earth and sky together.  
Are comments like ours really needed? Of course, heaven is nice  
About it, not saying anything, but we, when we come away  
As children leaving school at four in the afternoon, can we  
Hold our heads up and face the night's homework? No, the  
Divine tolerance we seem to feel is actually in short supply,  
And those moving forward toward us from the other end of the bridge  
Are defending, not welcoming us to, the place of power,  
A hill ringed with low, ridgelike fortifications. But when  
Somebody better prepared crosses over, he or she will get the same  
Cold reception. And so because it is impossible to believe  
That anyone lives there, it is we who shall be homeless, outdoors

At the end. And we won't quite know what to do about it.  
It's mind-boggling, actually. Each of us must try to concentrate  
On some detail or other of their armor: somber, blood-red plumes  
Floating over curved blue steel; the ribbed velvet stomacher  
And its more social implications. Hurry to deal with the sting  
Of added meaning, hurry to fend it off. Your lessons  
Will become the ground of which we are made  
And shall look back on, for awhile. Life was pleasant there.  
And though we made it all up, it could still happen to us again.  
Only then, watch out. The burden of proof of the implausible  
Picaresque tale, boxes within boxes, will be yours  
Next time round. And nobody is going to like your ending.

We had, though, a feeling of security  
But we weren't aware of it then: that's  
How secure we were. Now, in the dungeon of Better Living,  
It seems we may be called back and interrogated about it  
Which would be unfortunate, since only the absence of memory  
Animates us as we walk briskly back and forth  
At one with the soulless, restless crowd on the somber avenue.  
Is there something new to see, to speculate on? Dunno, better  
Stand back until something comes along to explain it,  
This curious lack of anxiety that begins to gnaw  
At one. Did it come because happiness hardened everything  
In its fire, and so the forms cannot die, like a ruined  
Fort too strong to be pulled down? And something like pale  
Alpine flowers still flourishes there:  
Some reminder that can never be anything more than that,  
Yet its balm cares about something, we cannot be really naked  
Having this explanation. So a reflected image of oneself  
Manages to stay alive through the darkest times, a period  
Of unprecedented frost, during which we get up each morning  
And go about our business as usual.

And though there are some who leave regularly  
For the patchwork landscape of childhood, north of here,  
Our own kind of stiff standing around, waiting helplessly  
And mechanically for instructions that never come, suits the space  
Of our intense, uncommunicated speculation, marries  
The still life of crushed, red fruit in the sky and tames it  
For observation purposes. One is almost content  
To be with people then, to read their names and summon  
Greetings and speculation, or even nonsense syllables and  
Diagrams from those who appear so brilliantly at ease  
In the atmosphere we made by getting rid of most amenities  
In the interests of a bare, strictly patterned life that apparently  
Has charms we weren't even conscious of, which is  
All to the good, except that it fumbles the premise  
We put by, saving it for a later phase of intelligence, and now  
We are living on it, ready to grow and make mistakes again,  
Still standing on one leg while emerging continually  
Into an inexpressive void, the blighted fields  
Of a kiss, the rope of a random, unfortunate  
Observation still around our necks though we thought we  
Had cast it off in a novel that has somehow gotten stuck  
To our lives, battening on us. A sad condition  
To see us in, yet anybody  
Will realize that he or she has made those same mistakes,  
Memorized those same lists in the due course of the process  
Being served on you now. Acres of bushes, treetops;  
Orchards where the quince and apple seem to come and go  
Mysteriously over long periods of time; waterfalls  
And what they conceal, including what comes after—roads and roadways  
Paved for the gently probing, transient automobile;  
Farragoes of flowers; everything, in short,  
That makes this explicit earth what it appears to be in our  
Glassiest moments when a canoe shoots out from under some foliage  
Into the river and finds it calm, not all that exciting but above all

Nothing to be afraid of, celebrates us  
And what we have made of it.

Not something so very strange, but then seeming ordinary  
Is strange too. Only the way we feel about the everything  
And not the feeling itself is strange, strange to us, who live  
And want to go on living under the same myopic stars we have known  
Since childhood, when, looking out a window, we saw them  
And immediately liked them.

And we can get back to that raw state  
Of feeling, so long deemed  
Inconsequential and therefore appropriate to our later musings  
About religion, about migrations. What is restored  
Becomes stronger than the loss as it is remembered;  
Is a new, separate life of its own. A new color. Seriously blue.  
Unquestioning. Acidly sweet. Must we then pick up the pieces  
(But what are the pieces, if not separate puzzles themselves,  
And meanwhile rain abrades the window?) and move to a central clearing-  
house

Somewhere in Iowa, far from the distant bells and thunderclaps that  
Make this environment pliant and distinct? Nobody  
Asked me to stay here, at least if they did I forgot, but I can  
Hear the dust at the pores of the wood, and know then  
The possibility of something more liberated and gracious  
Though not of this time. Failing  
That there are the books we haven't read, and just beyond them  
A landscape stippled by frequent glacial interventions  
That holds so well to its lunette one wants to keep it but we must  
Go on despising it until that day when environment  
Finally reads as a necessary but still vindictive opposition  
To all caring, all explaining. Your finger traces a  
Bleeding violet line down the column of an old directory and to this  
spongy

State of talking things out a glass exclamation point opposes  
A discrete claim: forewarned. So the voluminous past  
Accepts, recycles our claims to present consideration  
And the urban landscape is once again untroubled, smooth  
As wax. As soon as the oddity is flushed out  
It becomes monumental and anxious once again, looking  
Down on our lives as from a baroque pinnacle and not the  
Mosquito that was here twenty minutes ago.  
The past absconds  
With our fortunes just as we were rounding a major  
Bend in the swollen river; not to see ahead  
Becomes the only predicament when what  
Might be sunken there is mentioned only  
In crabbed allusions but will be back tomorrow.

It takes only a minute revision, and see—the thing  
Is there in all its interested variegatedness,  
With prospects and walks curling away, never to be followed,  
A civilized concern, a never being alone.  
Later on you'll have doubts about how it  
Actually was, and certain greetings will remain totally forgotten,  
As water forgets a dam once it's over it. But at this moment  
A spirit of independence reigns. Quietude  
To get out and do things in, and a rush back to the house  
When evening turns up, and not a moment too soon.  
Headhunters and jackals mingle with the viburnum  
And hollyhocks outside, and it all adds up, pointedly,  
To something one didn't quite admit feeling uneasy about, but now  
That it's all out in the open, like a successful fire  
Burning in a fireplace, really there's no cause for alarm.  
For even when hours and days go by in silence and the phone  
Never rings, and widely spaced drops of water  
Fall from the eaves, nothing is any longer a secret  
And one can live alone rejoicing in this:

That the years of war are far off in the past or the future,  
That memory contains everything. And you see slipping down a hallway  
The past self you decided not to have anything to do with any more  
And it is a more comfortable you, dishonest perhaps,  
But alive. Wanting you to know what you're losing.  
And still the machinery of the great exegesis is only beginning  
To groan and hum. There are moments like this one  
That are almost silent, so that bird-watchers like us  
Can come, and stay awhile, reflecting on shades of difference  
In past performances, and move on refreshed.

But always and sometimes questioning the old modes  
And the new wondering, the poem, growing up through the floor,  
Standing tall in tubers, invading and smashing the ritual  
Parlor, demands to be met on its own terms now,  
Now that the preliminary negotiations are at last over.  
You could be lying on the floor,  
Or not have time for too much of any one thing,  
Yet you know the song quickens in the bones  
Of your neck, in your heel, and there is no point  
In looking out over the yard where tractors run,  
The empty space in the endless continuum  
Of time has come up: the space that can be filled only by you.  
And I had thought about the roadblocks, wondered  
Why they were less frequent, wondered what progress the blizzard  
Might have been making a certain distance back there,  
But it was not enough to save me from choosing  
Myself now, from being the place I have to get to  
Before nightfall and under the shelter of trees  
It is true but also without knowing out there in the dark,  
Being alone at the center of a moan that did not issue from me  
And is pulling me back toward old forms of address  
I know I have already lived through, but they are strong again,  
And big to fill the exotic spaces that arguing left.

So all the slightly more than young  
Get moved up whether they like it or not, and only  
The very old or the very young have any say in the matter,  
Whether they are a train or a boat or just a road leading  
Across a plain, from nowhere to nowhere. Later on  
A record of the many voices of the middle-young will be issued  
And found to be surprisingly original. That can't concern us,  
However, because now there isn't space enough,  
Not enough dimension to guarantee any kind of encounter  
The stage-set it requires at the very least in order to burrow  
Profitably through history and come out having something to say,  
Even just one word with a slightly different intonation  
To cause it to stand out from the backing of neatly invented  
Chronicles of things men have said and done, like an English horn,  
And then to sigh, to faint back  
Into all our imaginings, dark  
And viewless as they are,  
Windows painted over with black paint but  
We can sufficiently imagine, so much is admitted, what  
Might be going on out there and even play some part  
In the ordering of it all into lengths of final night,  
Of dim play, of love that at last oozes through the seams  
In the cement, suppurates, subsumes  
All the other business of living and dying, the orderly  
Ceremonials and handling of estates,  
Checking what does not appear normal and drawing together  
All the rest into the report that will finally be made  
On a day when it does not appear that there is anything to receive it  
Properly and we wonder whether we too are gone,  
Buried in our love,  
The love that defined us only for a little while,  
And when it strolls back a few paces, to get another view,  
Fears that it may have encountered eternity in the meantime.  
And as the luckless describe love in glowing terms to strangers

In taverns, and the seemingly blessed may be unaware of having lost it,  
So always there is a small remnant  
Whose lives are congruent with their souls  
And who ever afterward know no mystery in it,  
The cimmerian moment in which all lives, all destinies  
And incompleting destinies were swamped  
As though by a giant wave that picks itself up  
Out of a calm sea and retreats again into nowhere  
Once its damage is done.  
And what to say about those series  
Of infrequent pellucid moments in which  
One reads inscribed as though upon an empty page  
The strangeness of all those contacts from the time they erupt  
Soundlessly on the horizon and in a moment are upon you  
Like a stranger on a snowmobile  
But of which nothing can be known or written, only  
That they passed this way? That to be bound over  
To love in the dark, like Psyche, will somehow  
Fill the sheaves of pages with a spidery, Spencerian hand  
When all that will be necessary will be to go away  
For a few minutes in order to return and find the work completed?  
And so it is the only way  
That love determines us, and we look the same  
To others when they happen in afterwards, and cannot even know  
We have changed, so massive in our difference  
We are, like a new day that looks and cannot be the same  
As those we used to reckon with, and so start  
On our inane rounds again too dumb to profit from past  
Mistakes—that's how different we are!

But once we have finished being interrupted  
There is no longer any population to tell us how the gods  
Had wanted it—only—so the story runs—a vast forest  
With almost nobody in it. Your wants

Are still halfheartedly administered to; sometimes there is milk  
And sometimes not, but a ladder of hilarious applause  
No longer leads up to it. Instead, there's that cement barrier.  
The forest ranger was nice, but warning us away,  
Reminded you how other worlds can as easily take root  
Like dandelions, in no time. There's no one here now  
But émigrés, with abandoned skills, so near  
To the surface of the water you can touch them through it.  
It's they can tell you how love came and went  
And how it keeps coming and going, ever disconcerting,  
Even through the topiary trash of the present,  
Its undoing, and smiles and seems to recognize no one.  
It's all attitudinizing, maybe, images reflected off  
Some mirrored surface we cannot see, and they seem both solid  
As a suburban home and graceful phantasms, at ease  
In any testing climate you may contrive. But surely  
The slightly sunken memory that remains, accretes, is proof  
That there were doings, yet no one admits to having heard  
Even of these. You pass through lawns on the way to it; it's late  
Even though the light is strongly yellow; and are heard  
Commenting on how hard it is to get anybody to do anything  
Any more; suddenly your name is remembered at the end—  
It's there, on the list, was there all along  
But now is too defunct to cope  
Which may be better in the long run: we'll hear of  
Other names, and know we don't want them, but that love  
Was somehow given out to one of them by mistake,  
Not utterly lost. Boyish, slipping past high school  
Into the early forties, disingenuous though, yet all  
The buds of this early spring won't open, which is surprising,  
He says. It isn't likely to get any warmer than it is now.  
In today's mainstream one mistakes him, sincerely, for someone else;  
He passed on slowly and turns a corner. One can't say  
He was gone before you knew it, yet something of that, some tepid

Challenge that was never taken up and disappeared forever,  
Surrounds him. Love is after all for the privileged.

But there is something else—call it a consistent eventfulness,  
A common appreciation of the way things have of enfolding  
When your attention is distracted for a moment, and then  
It's all bumps and history, as though this crusted surface  
Had always been around, didn't just happen to come into being  
A short time ago. The scarred afternoon is unfortunate  
Perhaps, but as they come to see each other dimly  
And for the first time, an internal romance  
Of the situation rises in these human beings like sap  
And they can at last know the fun of not having it all but  
Having instead a keen appreciation of the ways in which it  
Underachieves as well as rages: an appetite,  
For want of a better word. In darkness and silence.

In the wind, it is living. What were the interruptions that  
Led us here and then shanghaied us if not sincere attempts to  
Understand and so desire another person, it doesn't  
Matter which one, and then, self-abandoned, to build ourselves  
So as to desire him fully, and at the last moment be  
Taken aback at such luck: the feeling, invisible but alert.  
On that clear February evening thirty-three years ago it seemed  
A tapestry of living sounds shading to colors, and today  
On this brick stump of an office building the colors are shaggy  
Again, are at last what they once were, proving  
They haven't changed: you have done that,  
Not they. All that remains is to get to know them,  
Like a twin brother from whom you were separated at birth  
For whom the factory sounds now resonate in an uplifting  
Sunset of your own choosing and fabrication, a rousing  
Anthem to perpendicularity and the perennial exponential  
Narration to cause everything to happen by evoking it

Within the framework of shared boredom and shared responsibilities.  
Cheerful ads told us it was all going to be OK,  
That the superstitions would do it all for you. But today  
It's bigger and looser. People are not out to get you  
And yet the walkways look dangerous. The smile slowly soured.  
Still, coming home through all this  
And realizing its vastness does add something to its dimension:  
Teachers would never have stood for this. Which is why  
Being tall and shy, you can still stand up more clearly  
To the definition of what you are. You are not a sadist  
But must only trust in the dismantling of that definition  
Some day when names are being removed from things, when all attributes  
Are sinking in the maelstrom of de-definition like spars.  
You must then come up with something to say,  
Anything, as long as it's no more than five minutes long,  
And in the interval you shall have been washed. It's that easy.  
But meanwhile, I know, stone tenements are still hoarding  
The shadow that is mine; there is nothing to admit to,  
No one to confess to. This period goes on for quite a few years  
But as though along a low fence by a sidewalk. Then brandishes  
New definitions in its fists, but these are evidently false  
And get thrown out of court. Next you're on your own  
In an old film about two guys walking across the United States.  
The love that comes after will be richly satisfying,  
Like rain on the desert, calling unimaginable diplomacy into being  
Until you thought you should get off here, maybe this stop  
Was yours. And then it all happens blindingly, over and over  
In a continuous, vivid present that wasn't there before.  
No need to make up stories at this juncture, everybody  
Likes a joke and they find yours funny. And then it's just  
Two giant steps down to the big needing and feeling  
That is yours to grow in. Not grow old, the  
Magic present still insists on being itself,  
But to play in. To live and be lived by

And in this way bring all things to the sensible conclusion  
Dreamed into their beginnings, and so arrive at the end.

Simultaneously in an area the size of West Virginia  
The opposing view is climbing toward heaven: how swiftly  
It rises! How slender the packed silver mass spiraling  
Into further thinness, into what can only be called excess,  
It seems, now. And anyway it sounds better in translation  
Which is the only language you will read it in:

"I was lost, but seemed to be coming home,  
Through quincunxes of apple trees, but ever  
As I drew closer, as in Zeno's paradox, the mirage  
Of home withdrew and regrouped a little farther off.  
I could see white curtains fluttering at the windows  
And in the garden under a big brass-tinted apple tree  
The old man had removed his hat and was gazing at the grass  
As though in sorrow, sorrow for what I had done.  
Realizing it was now or never, I lurched  
With one supreme last effort out of the dream  
Onto the couch-grass behind the little red-painted palings:  
I was here! But it all seemed so lonesome. I was welcomed  
Without enthusiasm. My room had been kept as it was  
But the windows were closed, there was a smell of a closed room.  
And though I have been free ever since  
To browse at will through my appetites, lingering  
Over one that seemed special, the lamplight  
Can never replace the sad light of early morning  
Of the day I left, convinced (as indeed I am today)  
Of the logic of my search, yet all unprepared  
To look into the practical aspects, the whys and wherefores,  
And so never know, eventually, whether I have accomplished  
My end, or merely returned, another leaf that falls."  
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Deploys his message like iron trenches under ground  
That rise here and there in blunt, undulating shapes.  
And once you have told someone that none of it frightens you  
There is still the breached sense of your own being  
To live with, to somehow nurse back to plenitude:  
Yet it never again has that hidden abundance,  
That relaxed, joyous well-being with which  
In other times it frolicked along roads, making  
The best of ignorance and unconscious, innocent selfishness,  
The spirit that was to occupy those times  
Now transposed, sunk too deep in its own reflection  
For memory. The eager calm of every day.  
But in the end the dark stuff, the odd quick attack  
Followed by periods of silence that get shorter and shorter  
Resolves the subjective-versus-objective approach by undoing  
The complications of our planet, its climate, its sonatinas  
And stories, its patches of hard ugly snow waiting around  
For spring to melt them. And it keeps some memories of the troubled  
Beginning-to-be-resolved period even in the timely first inkling  
Of maturity in March, "when night and day grow equal," but even  
More in the solemn peach-harvest that happens some months later  
After differing periods of goofing-off and explosive laughter.  
To be always articulating these preludes, there seems to be no  
Sense in it, if it is going to be perpetually five o'clock  
With the colors of the bricks seeping more and more bloodlike through the  
tan  
Of trees, and then only to blacken. But it says more  
About us. When they finally come  
With much laborious jangling of keys to unlock your cell  
You can tell them yourself what it is,  
Who you are, and how you happened to turn out this way,  
And how they made you, for better or for worse, what you are now,  
And how you seem to be, neither humble nor proud, *frei aber einsam*.

And should anyone question the viability of this process  
You can point to the accessible result. Not like a great victory  
That tirelessly sweeps over mankind again and again at the end  
Of each era, presuming you can locate it, for the greater good  
Of history, though you are not the first person to confuse  
Its solicitation with something like scorn, but the slow polishing  
Of an infinitely tiny cage big enough to hold all the dispiritedness,  
Contempt, and incorrect conclusions based on false premises that now  
Slow you down but by that time, enchaliced, will sound attentive,  
Tonic even, an antidote to badly reasoned desiring: footfalls  
Of the police approaching gingerly through the soft spring air.

At Pine Creek imitation the sky was no nearer. The difference  
Was microtones, a seasoning between living and gestures.  
It emerged as a rather stiff impression  
Of all things. Not that there aren't those glad to have  
A useful record like this to add to the collection  
In the portfolio. But beyond just needing where is the need  
To carry heaven around in one's breast-pocket? To satisfy  
The hunger of millions with something more substantial than good wishes  
And still withhold the final reassurance? So you see these  
Days each with its disarming set of images and attitudes  
Are beneficial perhaps but only after the last one  
In every series has disappeared, down the road, forever, at night.

It would be cockier to ask of heaven just what is this present  
Of an old dishpan you bestowed on me? Can I get out the door  
With it, now that so many old enmities and flirtations have shrunk  
To little more than fine print in the contexts of lives and so much  
New ground is coming undone, shaken out like a scarf or a handkerchief  
From this window that dominates everything perhaps a little too much?  
In falling we should note the protective rush of air past us  
And then pray for some day after the war to cull each of

The limited set of reflections we were given at the beginning  
To try to make a fortune out of. Only then will some kind of radical stance  
Have had some meaning, and for itself, not for us who lie gasping  
On slopes never having had the nerve to trust just us, to go out with us,  
Not fearing some solemn overseer in the breath from the treetops.

And that that game-plan and the love we have been given for nothing  
In particular should coincide—no, it is not yet time to think these things.  
In vain would one try to peel off that love from the object it fits  
So nicely, now, remembering it will have to be some day. You  
Might as well offer it to your neighbor, the first one you meet, or throw  
It away entirely, as plan to unlock on such and such a date  
The door to this forest that has been your total upbringing.  
No one expects it, and thus  
Flares are launched out over the late disturbed landscape  
Of items written down only to be forgotten once more, forever this time.

And already the sky is getting to be less salmon-colored,  
The black clouds more meaningless (otter-shaped at first;  
Now, as they retreat into incertitude, mere fins)  
And perhaps it's too late for anything like the overhaul  
That seemed called for, earlier, but whose initiative  
Was it after all? I mean I don't mind staying here  
A little longer, sitting quietly under a tree, if all this  
Is going to clear up by itself anyway.

There is no indication this will happen,  
But I don't mind. I feel at peace with the parts of myself  
That questioned this other, easygoing side, chafed it  
To a knotted rope of guesswork looming out of storms  
And darkness and proceeding on its way into nowhere  
Barely muttering. Always, a few errands  
Summon us periodically from the room of our forethought  
And that is a good thing. And such attentiveness

Besides! Almost more than anybody could bring to anything,  
But we managed it, and with a good grace, too. Nobody  
Is going to hold *that* against us. But since you bring up the question  
I will say I am not unhappy to place myself entirely  
At your disposal temporarily. Much that had drained out of living  
Returns, in those moments, mounting the little capillaries  
Of polite questions and seeming concern, I want it back.

And though that other question that I asked and can't  
Remember any more is going to move still farther upward, casting  
Its shadow enormously over where I remain, I can't see it.  
Enough to know that I shall have answered for myself soon,  
Be led away for further questioning and later returned  
To the amazingly quiet room in which all my life has been spent.  
It comes and goes; the walls, like veils, are never the same,  
Yet the thirst remains identical, always to be entertained  
And marveled at. And it is finally we who break it off,  
Speed the departing guest, lest any question remain  
Unasked, and thereby unanswered. Please, it almost  
Seems to say, take me with you, I'm old enough. Exactly.  
And so each of us has to remain alone, conscious of each other  
Until the day when war absolves us of our differences. We'll  
Stay in touch. So they have it, all the time. But all was strange.



