THE HISTORY
OF THE WORLD AS PICTURES
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Printed and bound in the United States of América
for my father and mother
Daniel Francis Sullivan
and
Helen Murphy Sullivan
THE DEVINS MEMORIAL AWARD

*The History of the World As Pictures* is the first winner of the major prize of the “Kansas City Poetry Contests.” Nancy Sullivan’s manuscript was selected from more than three hundred manuscripts submitted anonymously by poets in forty-two states. The winning selection was made by Reed Whittemore, 1964–1965 Consultant in Poetry of the Library of Congress; Donald Justice, Lamont Prize winner; and Harold Whitehall, renowned linguist. A winner of the Devins Memorial Award is to be published each year by the University of Missouri Press.

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THE INSIDE OUTSIDE

When we talk of a poet’s honesty we may mean simply that he tells us what he sees and thinks, unmoved by the fashionable or politic; but we may also have in mind one of the results of such straightforwardness, that is, a poetry which consistently illuminates the special vision and character of the poet. Nancy Sullivan’s poetry is superficially impersonal, in that not many first-person constructions creep in, but in the way it poses for looking at the world it is most personal, and in this sense most honest—a way she describes on several occasions as that of an outsider looking in.

Sometimes she is a tourist poet, sometimes a historian, sometimes merely a bystander happening upon an event, a striking scene—but nearly always she is an observer rather than an active participant in the matters at hand. We will not expect her to fall literally upon the thorns of life, for that would be out of character, but to look carefully at the thorns, meditate upon them, and hopefully describe them with a clarity that someone typing in a thornbush could not.

The sequence of poems from which her book gains its title well illustrates her general attitude toward her material, as well as her procedures. She takes ten familiar pictures, starting with a prehistoric cave drawing and concluding with Jackson Pollock’s “Number 1,” then describes them and comments on them. Strung together historically the pictures may be, she tells us, “the meaning of the world, / Or they may be the only world with meaning”—a possibly overgrand proposition to presume to document in ten short poems about ten discrete pictures, but a proposition she comes at most modestly in the poems themselves by reminding us that she is indeed an outsider speaking, one who does not pretend to be more than a spectator of such grandness. Her role is to make
sociological and psychological forays into each picture's occasion for being, and, when there are characters portrayed, to try to enter briefly into their predicament, always however emphasizing her own detachment:

The pigment people stare into the miracle, rags to noses.
Odor of Lazarus in the womb.

Or:

He is in love.
Cupid has shot his heart with fire
For Daphne, a woodsy girl.

One notes in the picture sequence, and elsewhere too, the reoccurrence of "perhaps" or "it looks like" or "maybe" or a number of other gestures of tentativeness, especially the insistent interrogative. Here is commonly a tourist speaking, but a committed tourist — a tourist anomaly?

No, not an anomaly, not any more. We have become a race of committed tourists. Not only are we guided into tourism as a way of life by our cars and planes, but our obligations to mobility lead even the most passionate among us to despair of what keeps being called "total commitment," and to be embarrassed in the presence of lyrical ebullience, fervent prayers for intimacy. We look for solace in something else, something Nancy Sullivan’s work well displays. On one occasion, for example, she is simply a camera’s eye:

... mailbox,
Fence, cow, tractor, bicycle with man
Flick onto the retina’s clean spaces.

On another she is a bookworm reading Nelson Algren. And in perhaps two-thirds of the fifty or so poems here, pictures or still lifes of some sort are the starting points, the points at which the poet’s imagination sheds its slumbers and gets to work.
Now for many theorists about poetry the still life is just what poetry cannot, or should not, begin with. The matter-of-fact, the rational, the detached, the tentative—these are the attitudes which remove us from poetry itself, or the poetic. Certainly, if they are right, Sullivan's work is removed: its matter-of-factness is rhetorical as well as thematic; her lyricism, when she rarely indulges it, does not become her, nor does her occasional stab at engagement, as in "Cleopatra to Antony." But it is my conviction that a poetry of the matter-of-fact is not only possible but necessary in a world where the closenesses seldom materialize and have even ceased to be of much mythical significance, committed as we are to the alternate myths of objectivity, sound reporting, removal.

I mean simply that Nancy Sullivan's work seems to me to be central, current, germane. A deathly sociological pronouncement. Let me add that the work, though spotty, has a drive to it that one would not suspect of the matter-of-fact. Underneath the detached, outsider's pose is a nostalgia for its opposite that reminds me of Scott Fitzgerald, a boy from the not-quite-right block of Summit Avenue in St. Paul, with his nose pressed up against a ballroom window of a very important club during a big dance. Who the insiders were, then, Fitzgerald well knew, though he had mixed feelings about wanting to be one of them. Who the insiders are now is hard to say, but surely they are in the minority—and hence outside? Anyway, most of us are outside (inside?) now with Nancy Sullivan, taking pictures.

Reed Whittemore

July, 1965
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THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD AS PICTURES

The poem about the history of the world
As pictures will be in pieces like the history
Of that world and like those pictures
Each separate upon a wall in separate places.
Lined up they may be the meaning of the world
Or they may be the only world with meaning.
1. *Prehistoric Cave Painting of a Bison*

Perhaps it was being inside of something
That caused them to render it outside
By scrawling great beasts in screams
Of rust and black over the walls of the cave.
Perhaps it was the visitation of an idea,
An event so powerful
As to turn them into men.

The bison is taut inside the readiness
Of its fur. It has no dimensions
Because it is already huge. Miniature
Black men resembling the matches
No one yet knows about cast needles
At the beast that is large as Africa.
What it must have been like to scramble
In out of a rain to discover not only
The sensation of dryness, but a place
That had been visited by a god.
2. Design on a Greek Amphora: Apollo on a Winged Tripod (ca. 490 B.C.)

The very opposite of the cave with its bison
Because the design is on the outside here and hollow inside,
But the terra cotta colors and the black vase
Loop it to that earlier gallery
As an arrow is fulfilled in its prey.

Apollo carries his arrows at his shoulder
As he sits plucking a lyre on the curved Surface of the vase. He is in love.
Cupid has shot his heart with fire
For Daphne, a woody girl,
That eternal camper, later his laurel.
Why should the god of music and poetry Seek such a woman? Not to attain
Is the grasping of poetry and music its name.
Because a woman in her tree is better loved Than bison or boar. Sing, Apollo,
From your tripod above the sturdy wings of Pegasus.

"I sing a woman into bed
Her hair my pillow
Her arms my cage.
I sing us married or dead
For as accounted by the sage
Love is endless when wed.
Now only the leaves reckon
Where my love has fled."
3. *Buddha Expounding the Doctrine to Yásas, the First Lay Member of the Buddhist Community (5th Century)*

This too was painted on a rock,
On a pillar in a temple in India.
It pictures what the beginnings were like:
A man listening to his god in a garden of goodness.
The flowers are everywhere. What was Buddha
Offering to Yásas in that gouged-out hand?
Possibly a lotus. Surely not an apple.
Everything’s serene. Two men talk.
Their voices mingle: Yásas in the white
Face and garment of the layman and Buddha,
Big and brown. It is happy.

The roundness of the pillar is the wholeness of
the doctrine,
And the pillar itself like the detachment of holy men
Given to separate ways in the temples of their gods.
4. *A Triptych by Van Eyck* (ca. 1430)

There are three sections and the middle one
is larger than its sides. Christ is dead
in the center. It looks like this.

Left: Sprung late from his mother’s womb,
John the Baptist in the ombres of a hair skin
Lopes the desert, the Neanderthal of saints,
Crying us all into water and the tomb.

Center: It is Christ risen in a shower of light
Stunning as gaiety. A banner whirled
Above a god with a man’s skin. Everything is white
As if to strain the dirty reaches of the world
Into which he came. Observe the sight
Of a god risen on a lacquered board
Rushing headlong to his heaven to record
The sorrows of this place. Look to the right.

Right: How it stank in that tomb.
Inside the immaculate painting of that fierce
nativity
The pigment people stare into the miracle, rags
to noses.
Odor of Lazarus in the womb.
5. Spring in Chiang-nan by Wen Cheng-Ming (1547)

There is writing at the top, a criticism
Or perhaps a poem done in a calligraphy
More intricate than the branches on the trees,
And speaking more clearly than the singular boatsman
Brushed on to the long scroll with the skeleton of a feather.

Words and trees and one man in a boat.

The words, pictures themselves, explain what
The scene does not. I do not know what they mean,
But they must be a lesson telling things
That the old academician could not trust to the landscape.

It is spring in Chiang-nan. The trees tell it.
And a man, a stem in his half-moon of a boat,
Sits as though aware of the marvelous changes.
The picture is as still as the idea of China
Wrapped tight in the heavy kimono of its past,
But the colors are as soft as the beginnings of something.
The picture hangs long and narrow, as its theme does not.
6. *Las Meniñas* by Velazquez (1656)

The dwarfs dominate, at least theatrically.  
The little princess near the center, illuminated  
In her petulant reluctance to pose for yet  
Another portrait illustrates an idea of order,  
Not the governing parents, the mother and the father,  
Philip IV and Mariana of Austria, mere reflections  
In the distant mirror in the far places of the paint.  
The commissioned artist accepts a royal order  
Although he alone governs this pigment territory  
Where dwarfs rule and ugliness flowers to virtue.

We look into the picture to watch a situation,  
Into a tall room in the Alcazar hung with copies of Rubens.  
The Infanta Doña Margarita doesn’t want to pose.  
She is five years old and has had enough of paint.  
But forces are at work here: the perspective  
That holds the room together and holds the Rubens  
On to the painted walls. There are triangles  
Of people whose duties are enormous, eleven in all.  
Velazquez must paint, the ladies-in-waiting,  
*Las meniñas*, must cajole and pass some chocolate  
To the princess. The king and queen must  
Be that, but here without a single power.  
The man going up the steps must go up them.  
In the right hand corner, the dwarf Nicolasito  
Is stepping on the dog. Another, Maribarbola,  
Stares out of her massive face to tell a royal story.

Her brief finery is the somber opposite of little  
Margarita’s bright and golden style. She rules  
No empire nor ever will, but here she dominates the mind.
Beauty, a dog, and this wizened female
So ugly, so sad, so sufficient to this scene
As to make you wonder at the governments of men.
How detached the painter's glance now that he has
Put everyone in his place and upset the candor of Spain.
7. *Portrait of Mrs. Siddons* by Gainsborough (ca. 1785)

In a monumental hat above a swirl of blue clothes
The actress, Mrs. Siddons, assumes a rigid pose.
The furs drape to languor, but the woman is precise.
Once as his Lady, she thrust a bloody dagger through
   Macbeth's nice,
Reckless life to act to triumph the vanity of human wishes.
It sold out. Fame rose above the echo of kisses
Above the cheer of dapper London, and on to
   Gainsborough's brush.

She sits so in a damask chair in the hush
Of the bursting painting. Prime ministers might borrow
That face, Lord Nelson the nose. A conquered sorrow
In those black eyes is minimized by the close of the lips,
Unspeaking but full. No part of paint on part drips
Awkwardly. Surely through him her hair is her own.
A precise century dwindles and brings them to that.
Reason, reason, is this your lady's face or that her hat?
8. *La Gare Saint-Lazare* by Claude Monet (1877)

It is the picture of a thing in a place,
Not an apple or a pear in a bowl,
But of a train resting in its station
Surrounded by mist, smoke, vapor, and paint.

A few people stare down an opposite track
To focus a train coming from some point
Outside the picture. The only train important
To them is the one that will take them somewhere.

But with Monet, his train is stationary
In the station, going nowhere but here
Into its mechanical cathedral. What a revolution
Is involved in the turning of those intricate wheels

Into art. The hush of the waiting is there
As well as the light dappled with soot
And the tracks bearing the monumental weight
Of transportation transfixed in the mist of Paris.
9. *Night Fishing at Antibes* by Picasso (1939)

What is in it? First there is always that.
Two men spear fish by the light of abstract lanterns.
One has on a striped jersey, and with a four-pronged spear
Pierces a sole. At the right, near the sea wall,
Two girls stand watching. One has a bicycle
And is eating a double ice cream cone.
Or is it double? For what is single here?

How anxious that second fisherman
With his grey nose almost in the water.
His eye is in his nose.
The girl with the ice cream rests on her two fin feet.
One of the two fish has an eyebrow.
Inside the moon a spring spirals light down
Into the conventional waters. Lanterns
Are cut in corners. Two towers of the town
Surmount the rocky shore to the left;
At the bottom, a crab stares out.
Square are circles and vice versa.
*How* what is painted is the history here.
The design, the shape of this interlude,
Is its meaning decorated in the colors
Of a nocturne, in green, blue, purple, and light.
Brought to completion a month before World War again began,
The painting reminds me of why that war was ended:
So that men may fish and ladies dawdle
In the serene quiet of revolutionary places.
No name but a number.  
Trickles and valleys of paint  
Devise this maze  
Into a game of Monopoly  
Without any bank. Into  
A linoleum on the floor  
In a dream. Into  
Murals inside of the mind.  
No similes here. Nothing  
But paint. Such purity  
Taxes the poem that speaks  
Still of something in a place  
Or at a time.  
How to realize his question  
Let alone his answer?
IN AND OUT MUSEUMS

The outside people go inside for the inside story; 
Rooms within rooms, how the pilgrims lived; 
And the mummies, layer within layer within lair 
Like eggs, hard-boiled, two outsides and a yolk. 
The outside man was once egg too. 
From egg to man and back to that hard shell 
And these stone floors and rocks of ages past.

At the Met there is a painted room, Greek or Roman, 
Showing an outside world painted all around that 
Inside place. You look through a dense window 
At a Keatsian nightmare of static sun and blooming tree. 
Surely here history conceals its alternatives 
In this dream of generals, this subjunctive room.

On the real map of the world, only Venice is this absurd. 
Inside and out, everything there is sudden bridges and 
rococo. 
The engineered canals reflect the gauze of stumbling stone, 
And on nights when the moon makes much of itself, 
The entire city is the last museum: inside, past, pastel 
Reflected in the slippery alleys of itself. 
A future will reveal how all of a sudden, 
In twelve thousand years, it disappeared into the painted 
sea, 
An albatross nesting in the mane of St. Mark’s lion.
Some painters look up, or across, or at a thing level.  
You look down at the tops of things:  
A roof, the sidewalk, the sea, the people.  
Looking in at your window is a descent  
Into a world of averted surfaces.  
Everything covers itself with itself:  
Ripples the roof and the sea, shadows the sidewalk,  
Outlines the half faces, paint the canvas and you.
1. soup
   Let it be minestrone
   Slithery with spaghetti,
   Uncondensed,
   *Progresso* perhaps.
   What isn’t in it?
   The can is a garden,
   Do not dilute it.

2. beans
   Let the insides show,
   All the little brown beans
   Oozy in molasses.
   On top, a knob of streaky hog.
   How humble it tastes.

3. butter
   Let it be soft after it’s hard.
   Pats, blocks, quarters
   Yellow in the middle, the edges too.
   All golden, unctuous blond,
   Filling me up, filling me out.
   Land of Lakes, sweetly churned.

4. sandwich
   Let it be pastrami on rye,
   Lox on a bagel,
   Bacon, tomato, and lettuce
   Inbetween toast.
   It’s one thing on top of another
Thing on top of another thing
   With a top on.

5. soap
   Let it be green or blue or white.
   This one is white, a pure block of *Ivory*.
   It floats, white raft in the tub.
   Smaller and smaller it goes.

6. Brillo
   Let these prickly pads,
   Some dry, some pink with soap,
   Shine up the scene. Polish
   Pot, pan, and griddle.
      They work,
   But at the very end crumble all up,
      Into ironic little failures.

7. toothpaste
   Let the tubes be like skin;
      To bruise it, press hard.
   Now watch the paste spurt
      Icing the brush with fat
         green chemistry.
   Foaming at the mouth, she spat.

8. martini
   In a clear glass, its surface
      Smooth as a trampoline.
   Just a hint of gold shivers around.
   Down, down there the olive
9. beer

Rests lumpily, lustfully hoarding
Gin and vermouth in its meaty cave.

For those who drink deep.
The silky can
Fills the whole hand
Its top pops
And out it bubbles, a
Stream of amber and white.
Schlitz, Bud, Piels —
Like the merriest Christmas.
“Who, these days, drinks wine from a virgin’s skull?”

Behind the checkout at the A & P
The boys in wedding rings thicken
Into men. They bag the meat with artichokes,
The tissues with the toil of all their years to death.
Nights are beer in bottles after bottle.
No wine at all, or that skulduggery at best
In glasses thick as sneakers for the christening
Of a child, grape of their first bubbling feast.

Provide, supervise
Provender in packages for the simmering pots,
The icy chests. Virgin, finger the fruit
Vineless and profane under cellophane.

Superman, where are you?
In this market marked as such?
Poet, your stemware is your skull.
1. morning
Balloons, balloons are everywhere.
The spectacle of the morning rises
On the faint string of day. Everywhere
Shouts and hurrahs of what will be.
I lean on the sill of this morning window
Alive through the concessions of the night
To a vision of the paradox of death
Guileless now on sleep's hazardous pillow.

On the street, my morning milk stands sentry at the door;
A paperboy flings newsprint at my stoop.
Look! Abstractions march resplendent in the morning light!

The past convenes on the steps today
As though for a parade.
What is there, after all, but what was?
And it does march,
And it does fade.
Sounds
Accordian
Through the memory.
The click-clack of names, like agate marbles,
Across the hard conversations in my family:
Cracker Burns and Butts Murphy,
Timmy the Woodhooker, and the Gentle Sheean—
Muted now in the metallic music of the past.
Many are dead; the rest, repaired and raging, twitch
In this morning sunlight.
Sights

Of brave flags
And sailor suits
Stifle the memory with the sandy debris of summers
Through which, my brother, you scuffed your way
Toward bald and mealy manhood.
I kiss that daring child in you and clasp your hand.

Wait! Listen to my riddle. It is about you and all of us:
What has so much heart it cannot love,
So much sight it cannot see,
So much soul it cannot sanctify itself?
Give up. I never found the answer.
Now memory, giddy with power, stalks my mind.
And

Down

Down the stairs

To the door

(Death’s hinged door.)
I go to fetch this day’s nourishment, this day’s news,
And to watch from there, the second it’s ajar,
The past convene on the steps
As though for a parade.
For what is there, after all, but what was.
And it does march.
And it does fade.

2. afternoon: "... for the tenth part of a dollar."
"Step up, step up, right up. Give ear and eye
To the whirlpools of light which speak
In multicolored glances and round-and-round whispers
Of sawdust stars and ambrosial puffs of pink
Fragility balanced as a windowed bubble on the seal’s nose.
Everything, heart’s own engine, breaks eventually.
Look, ladies and gents, here at Captain Bob Tate,
Petrified Man. Does he live or die?
Does he sing in the confines of that pearly coffin?
And can he marry? Flap, flap, flaps the petal
Of his tent’s opening: To this Saul no David plucks
A tinny melody. Asquat nearby, his dusty nurse laps
With a lick a moat round her frozen custard’s turreted castle.
The wheel spins round a-round a-round a-round . . .
You’ll ring a dream with these concentric circles . . .
Step inside, sonny: it’s the eighth wonder of the world."

I was there as you were with those
Fountains, fountains everywhere
Feeding on limited water,
From whose down-deep, grim machinery
Abundance spurted, showered, flirted
With those who through a turnstile
Turned the bitter outside inside out
To walk rowdy and gaudy all
Of a topaz daytime wondering
Much later only if
Dreams too feasted on themselves.

3. evening
The people assemble in their assigned places with bakery boxes,
Night's promises thick on their hearts and faces
As the evening swoops down in navy-blue birds
To curve an iridescent rainbow over them
In feathers of virtuous color.
How like a warm place come into
Is love. I entered into
Its soft, geometric mystery
Of questions and promise one evening
To find that love too points its purple and terrible moral
As parentheses to the dream (Nothing, nothing satisfies.)

No one in legend or in a play
Told of what it was
That urged a virgin yield her womb to God
Or made of Abelard a poet.
I find this guarded page blank as shade.
Know it: nothing, nothing satisfies.
Love's definition is by omission.

Rome and Athens shadow in the broken sun of history,
And war upon war devalues the heart to a souvenir.
The rich crumble, and everything modifies
Into statement here where the poem should shout in the throat
Of the shuddering magnificence of love
Of a thunderous evening. Nothing, nothing satisfies.

Like a warm place come into
Is love in the early evening.
MOSAICS: THE MORNING PEOPLE
(Little historical love poems)

1. Was there love in the Eden garden
   When out from Adam's clicking ribs
   Eve fully naked and female sprang?
   Or did the heart of God compensate

   Them later only with this curious force
   As the pair fled out at angles
   Early that burning morning under cover
   And coat, under circling angels into the world?

2. It all happened in a blaze in insight.
   Rich with lily and cloth of gold,
   Her hair a mass of morning.
   The Flemish angel called the question:
   "Can you?" "Will you?"
   Aware of Joseph and of the certain complications,
   She replied, and love illuminated
   Her womb with affirmation
   Although the room was cool and the day dark.

3. A brief, glorious morning of a life.
   Like a later conqueror, Alexander Great
   Died at thirty-three. He left one feeble son
   By Roxana, no particular favorite among his several
   wives.
   The boy, like his father in this and name only, died
   young;
   So young that the noon of futile love never came,
   And he was spared the cruel comparisons of tutor
   Aristotle.
   The clause in Plutarch is his only fame.
4. Lazarus lost his sense of taste.
The wine was water, the water wine.
He walked a curiosity to those who loved him,
One to which they might have charged admission.
But when evening came with all its memories
Of the dark places and the heavy stone,
The odyssey of the sudden lover lifted and shone:
It was always morning in his mind.

5. The names of the saints and martyrs
Shower a chorus of separate sounds:
John, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas,
Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus,
Peter, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha,
Lucy, Agnes, Cecily, Anastasia.
They gild their cells on the prison page
With light and peace, and cool repose.
Let the whole earth keep holiday.

6. King Clovis, Frankish and thirty, married to
Clotilda, St.,
Burgundian princess, battled with God one morning
At Alemanni. A semi-victor, he bore the sweet yoke
Of baptism, of Gaul, and of much of Germany.
Only Charlemagne, and that some multithousand
Mornings later, made more of a monarchy.
Sing matin hymns, songs of Roland.

7. John the Baptist awakening
From a tedious, desert dream
Discovers his heart, a wanton metronome,
Beating a code of carols against his skin
Despite, despite
The frantic circle of his love's
 "Make straight, make straight!"

8. Joan of Arc, asleep in fields of fleur-de-lis,
Awakened to the soldiers and the sun
Lowering her sword as Charlie raised his sceptre
That coronation morning. Cleopatra
Wept brief ice cubes over Caesar,
Bald and snoring at her side.
After such a night, such a night,
She awaits her first breakfast as the queen.

9. From out Catherine of Valois into the organic morning
Spilled the Tudors of England. Place crowns on
Other and various Cates: Catherine de' Medici,
Catherine
The Great (Her name spiralled from Sophie to
Empress).
Haloes too: Catherine Tekakwitha, Catherine of
Hungary,
Catherine of Siena. Illustrious in love over in London,
Catherine Boucher, Blake's wife, after a warm, dawn
wedding
Clamored to read, to write, and to reflect the sun in him.

10. There is a dawn in Turner even in the sunsets,
An annunciation in his mind,
All golden pigment above the entry ports of Venice and Calais.
And Matisse too, drawing those wide-awake ladies
Through a gallery of sleepless nights
Arose with them to the sun
And to other glories in the fruit of afternoon.

11. Light, light and the play of light
On back and on hair arc,
On crown and on sceptre,
Coloring down in wedded patches
Over the bishop, and over Victoria
And over Albert, married and flickering
And red, and royal in the cathedral
Of the morning.

12. Who now? Decayed cherubs from the forties:
Churchill, the Duke of Windsor and his lady?
Or a morning of orphan thieves from an alley in Algiers?
Russia’s Kremlin, naive in the state sun,
A jet away from Lincoln’s grave, Eva’s Peron.
Mike Todd is dead and his widow wifed again.
Worry wraps white around his electric world.
Rise in the gray dawn; Eliot’s tea and toast
Epiphanies and litanies. Make ready.
CHRIST TRAPPED AT CANA

I

Down at Cana in Galilee, mother, son,
His friends, bid by a hectic bridegroom,
Crowded the catered feast in the wide room.
Fruit and bread cored into crumb. The wine gone,
She, milder than milk, willing it done,
Beggared from him that rash, red boon.
Meekness exploited into an action politic;
Unplanned through thirty years of rhetoric
Was a miracle less cleverly come by,
Less humanitarian and less wry
Than bucketing these rock urns dry
Of wine with a fiercer and richer berry
Than had ever wielded tipplers weary
At any wedding, wretched or merry.

II

Rushed was this day of his doing and undoing,
In polyphonic setting, Christ, mimicking God,
Anointed with vintage grape his grief and rod.
Divorced at this wedding of a man's viewing
What had, day before, been a boy's doing —
Weddings, feasts, yes to a mother's bidding —
He turned, vested in public weal and woe,
To the work fingered him a billion years ago.
Mary, at Cana, trapped Christ into distinction
For terms and the price, this dual reaction,
Of being a god. Not all choirs and sanction
He found, but a man wedding a wife without wine
And three more years to be doing and to dine
Before the last epiphany, the litany, the sign.
Today’s doing and today’s dying
Subdue the cold color of my future death.
A text found without trying
In Marianne Moore’s botanical conversation:
“We don’t like flowers that do
    not wilt; they must die . . .”
Does she lie?
I who pall at death and preservation
Recall a palace I daily pass
Enroute to Providence:
An artificial flower factory
Where warm hands puzzle and folly.

In it Martha works twisting wire into petal
And pistil, making stamen out of metal,
Fashioning (in June) the mâché wreaths
That will trace lacy zeroes for our Christmas,
Hollow as the wind world of their curve;
Fashioning (in January) crinkly carnations
For May’s mothersofusall: white and pink and red
For his and hers, and for the distracted dead.

    As in a showroom vase:
How gorgeously sterile those
Cloying clusters of rustly roses,
Those feigning ferns permanently barbed,
Bent by the fake alliteration of artificiality.
Where, in what lively parlor
Will these flowers bluff
And fluster their way
Echoing phrases from the houses of the dead?
At five Martha folds her frail career,
And home to a straggly ivy, to wan Mary,
And to jumpy Lazarus opening a beer,
She brings the *Evening Bulletin*; and dear
She fills their tomb with stew and love.

M. Moore didn’t lie.
Paper flowers, gaudy phantoms of sequined dust,
Spill out what we are and that we must
Ever dying, die;
Rage or sigh.
She simply says that of our guilt
We do not like flowers that cannot wilt.
Lazarus knows why.
In Newport, on lower Thames Street, there is or was
A club for old men, run with young men’s dollars;
The Hatchet Club. It is. That is all it does,
Or did. It has no high purpose, no parlors.

There, old men, nodding like pigeons in a park,
Their heads low on scraggy fronts, their feet absurd
Listen to an ancient radio, a Romanesque church,
Chant out the ballgame, the weather, the word.

Here at ninety, when I knew him best,
Came Jack Kelleher to hack out his weeks
In chill spells of coughs and quirks,
Having lived a plateau without valleys or peaks.

Jack Kelleher, once a maker of gates and fences,
Could still see the curlicued winches
And staves which he wrought
To imprison the rich from the poor.

For pleasure he walked and saved
The dollars chipped from his stone and iron
Until they built his wall and caved
Him up like a dowdy and lonely lion.

Now with others of his kind he sits to wait
For what it is the old wait for —
Knowing it must come, hopeful it will be late.
The Hatchet Club: good place for such a watch.
MONEY

The rich are important to a culture.
They and what they had are all that's left
Once the buildings topple and the people
Arrange themselves for archaeology.
Gauge a people by its rich.
All the Chippendale and artifacts
Of Williamsburg are early America
To me, not those stinking stowaways
Vomiting their way to Massachusetts.

So it was in Greece and earlier in Babylonia.
The poor are merely figures on parade.
They march along the walls of the tomb of a rich man.
The whole place is a poorhouse where weaver and brewer
Cart this and that to there for the man who has preserved
Their thin selves and their endless little skills.
There is something of the church on ships.
The proof of God is everywhere
Despite us: in the order and the aisles,
And in the sea, Mediterranean and breathing
In waves like whips, roaring prehistoric prayers

We have no Rosetta to decipher. I lisp
My lesser language, and time with its weekly currency
Of minute coins and paper hours pockets us at will.
The host is absent from our princely meals.
Pale wine awash in my glass. Can it be Sunday still?

Each day swoops down in listless gulls.
White we sail through distances that differ
With the compass in the brain, its map and clock.
God is everywhere: dogma from a mental dry dock
Meaning now surely, when God is every and daily on
this Sunday.
TO REMEMBER

We travel to the memory of it.
Events in the movie of the mind
Happen in rapid scenes,
In splendid revivals
Time over time,
Cranking the brain's endless reels to find

The Moment more coveted each repetition.
We travel to the memory of it.
From the theatre of the actual night
Or morning later, we pluck at rarer sights
And plunder. Whatever happened happens after.
We travel to the memory of it.
Ani, an Egyptian, understood the insecurity of death. 
How staying home was going home, 
How urn and oil and beer were necessary 
In the underworld of wonders.

The walls of Ani's expensive tomb display 
Life's everydayness: the business of the larder and the laundry, 
The panic of sudden hunger should all this fail him. 
And elongated servants, pale as charity, 
Stand stiff surrounded by so much horde and plenty.

Ani, the Scribe, washed his heart 
In the murmur of the Nile as he lay 
Sickening for death. When it was over 
And while the embalmers were shriveling 
His skin to last forever, Ani and his wife 
Entered together into the judgment hall, 
A shrine of fire and living serpents that rests 
Upon a stream of water. 
Osiris, maker of gods, the king of south and north, 
Sat behind the scale of judgment watching. 
The platters of his scale carried on one side 
A feather, and on the other Ani's heart 
Bearing its virtues like medals in aluminum, or lighter.

How diminutive a man is that a feather 
Could outweigh his essence and his juices, 
His righteousness and fury, 
And his marriage to a priestess.
Ani's wife stood wringing her paper hands
Unable to prophesy or pray his ordeal over.
Am-mit, Eater of the Dead, crouched
Ready to devour the heart in a single pounce
Should Osiris find it lighter, lacking, or uncomely.

But Ani's heart was heavy, and he lay staring through
his mummy
For years before the robbers came.
Bearing him no malice, they stole
His urns and oil, and the necklaces and rings
From the coil of his neck and from his fingers, dry as
old cigars.
Then they hacked him up into the pieces
Of a puzzle and threw him, bandages and all,
To their hungry camels who had sat folded up
All night in the hollows of the dunes.
A tourist from the Tabard, from steak and kidney
At the George, went into the cathedral
To discover open-eyed in oaken armor, the
gape-mouthed,
Supine effigy of an “unknown Crusader,”
Circa thirteenth, fourteenth centuries.
He stared her a bloodphrased, woodgrained stare.
And she heard in that mouth honey bees, and
Melodies, and other medieval harmonies.
Now could she, caught in this holy situation
And position, with Lancelot Andrewes parallel
Across the aisle? Better this than Peter’s wedge
Of passionless foot, she thought,
And bent to a kiss on his splintery lips
Searching its garden for that heraldic tongue.

In outside Southwark the overhanging
Iron ribs reminded her of the New York
Elevated. She yawned, knightless in London,
And wondered as she boarded the red, lumbering
Bus to rumble over the tepid Thames
About the why and where of it, and the who
Cares, and the when and how much
His lips might intrude on her maple dreams.
THE NUNS IN ROME

Belong there. It is their place.
Their oily, rose-olive faces
Babbled together
On a black dance through the round arenas,
Around the spouting piazzas, into the arms
Of St. Peter's on the morning of the Audience.
Inside, as they ripped through the red-yellow lines,
To fly — bat, crow, eagle — to John yelling "Papa! Papa!"
The rest of us stared, amazed at this justice:
The bright surprise of their kisses on his welcoming hands.

In Rome, where the sweaty monks are often unshaven
And go about God's business with dirty feet,
Brown studies on the humming trolley cars,
One is aware why it was St. Paul told the ladies
To tie up their hair in a cloth or something,
And the why of these shouting, giddy nuns in Rome.
I remember the prim discretions of New York nuns who walk
Wrapped up on tightropes to joy, outlanders on Fifth Avenue.
We cannot, for all of our talk, arrange ourselves
With that ease of shelf to book, shirt to back, head to hat
As the Romans have, so rich under such shelter.

Thinking of Rome, I weep, not over death exactly:
Caesar's grave, the tomb of the Great Apostle,
But over a fact:
Italy undid, as swiftly as one might a blouse,
Curious heart lacings and longings.
But too late, all that, and in another language.
I turn again to the old lean dialect:
Crabbed and closed, snapped tighter,
(More so) than a nun’s furled, black umbrella.
Everywhere in the world he showed us
Over that dusty bulb, our Riviera,
The total sun here in this steady room.
Our eyes were answers in the gloom
That we still were where we were
And not there: not on a street in Paris,
Nor in Venice on the mustard-green canal.
We were here in the concrete Bronx
In our apartment on the second floor
Sitting on the sofa, bored and harassed.

It was insanely vivid, as from the front
Row at a technicolored movie. Giddy colors,
And many miniature men in great disorder
Hopping the Cairo streets, selling combs and water.
A picture of Hal in Athens entering a bus.

Thumb and finger on the square corners of the world,
He focused the brilliant skies to a violent blue
That popped into sight, two inches by two, distilled
And shrill like the fierce inch of French perfume
That he brought back always to an aunt and mother.

The night flashed on and off and we were sweating
Even on the Alps or at the crumbling, heaped up temples.
Hunched over the little box that only one
Could see into, or else the view in the lint and light.

Of the plastic cube would be all askew,
Tilted and cockeyed as nights on a tipsy sea.
Or rooms through lavender windows. He lectured
On the paella in Barcelona, the scallopine in Rome,
The beer in Munich, the plumbing in Hadrian’s Villa.

Leaning back, done in by talk and travel,
I recorded the monotony in his liturgy.
I saw his face sideways on that pixie screen
Distorted and obscene like a pensive gargoyle.

Continents later, the Ancient Mariner gathered up
The countries in the slides and packed up finally
To leave us weary, tired wedding guests.
Where he went my friends tell in similar stories.
He is legend now who travels lonely.
A FLAT POEM ABOUT THE HILL

Red, white, and navy blue, the blackout,
The rainbow in Roosevelt's voice.
Many colors is the memory of a war.
The only khaki I remember is an uncle.

Today on black and white television (it is Sunday)
I watch a program about Monte Cassino,
Where I once went on a bus in a peaceful summer.
Aboard was an Englishman who had fought in the battle.
He ran up and down that cage of the bus as it lurched up and down
The blazing white Arizona streets of the town,
His gun a camera. I refused to share his vision,
And his wife turned lukewarm eyes to the message of this geography.
Up, up the hill we spiralled. Below, the new town looked a Levittown;
Above, the new monastery looked the fortress it once was.
The monks were having lunch and our guide, a blond war widow,
Argued wildly in that language of cheese and tomatoes
Before we got in and a small monk with his hands in his sleeves
Like a muff took us to see what there was to see
And led us to wonder at the bounceyness of man,
How well he repairs himself.
A uniform enveloped the Englishman, although it was tweed
And the rank unmarked. He was an insider among outlanders.

On the television, the camouflaged men scratch
Up and up the barbered hills to the monastery.
Someone (bad guys) shoots them down.
The scene shifts to an office lined with dictionaries.
An ex-German general in an English jacket
Explains that there really weren't any Germans
In that holy dwelling, only the monks
Sweetly singing. Next we're back at the war;
A chunky abbot beats it into a waiting car.
He is being taken to sign a statement
Saying that there really weren't any Germans up there,
So-help-me-God. So I guess there weren't any Germans up there.

I've often felt guilty about that Englishman and thought to
Make a poem of him, pretending that the defective poem
Might compensate for my neglect.
The television program proved that no Germans were up there.
Now that Englishman can pick up his gear
And clear out of my conscience.
He is Charlie Chaplin. He is King Lear,
Ironic as a salute in the rain.
IN THE FIELDS

The green antennae of the hedges sharpen into sticks.
The crusty Fall explodes its colors.
The trees strew rusty ruins on the lawn.
This house is stiff against the simple field.
Barbed wire divides the lawn from the unmoved land.
The smell of the place is something gold.

In the fields the cows, season after season,
Swirl those wigged swatters round their rumps,
Metronomes clocking the small annoyances of Eden.

Besides them, what is in these empty places?
What so tough and soothing there
As that salt block on a cow's rough tongue?
Everything that has been so forever.
The low bleat of the world began in ferny spaces.
And when it ends in craters scooped out
Of the sand as on a moon gone out,
This landscape, already what it never was,
Will wear its own memory,
A place that needs no snow to sweeten itself to virtue;
This morning, the field is pale with peace.
OVER THE PACIFIC

What if they had bobbed over the Pacific
In rows of Chinese junks to the city
Of gold, to the city of bridges
Having spanned a revolution with an oar?
What if they had planted the first corn
There and worked East from the East
To a New York without any Knickerbockers
To a New England gauche as a girl?

A somersault in opposites, a cargo of water,
And no Saint Francis. Watching everything now
Tinted and reflected in the slippery buildings
In Manhattan, the wonder is greater. Would
An earthquake in San Francisco question better
Than these derricks do? What if they had
Come over the Pacific bearing Buddha and rice
To the fields of waving gold?
Ah Yeats, you’re full of peat and dyes.
The greenery of Ireland has made you see
All ladies as lovelies with blue eyes.
No young man ever caught his breath at me
When I passed by, sooty-haired
With eyes the color of an unprized marble.
No young man swooned, caught his breath,
Or even coughed. Yeats, you’re from the
dreamer’s land.

And were a fool. All ladies are not
Golden-haired with sapphire eyes.
Maude Gonne was one in twenty
When you were young and foolish
Down in those salley gardens.
She conned you into bombing a poet’s larder:
The post office, the library. She told lies.
Well, no young man ever caught his breath
When I passed by, and things rip
At the seams as well as in the center.
Everything is real.
All the horses, broads, syringes,
And pimps in the neon world of Nelson Algren
Are real, really; and himself in a nineteen-forty
Suit with a toothpick in his boot, to boot.
Rinse and raise all your golden arms
Because Prometheus is unbound in Chicago.

Everyone is real in the way he best can be.

A gray woman stoops over the water
Fountain this morning, her neck
Bent as to the axe, her thirst so deep
At that little white sepulchre it chokes me.
So: the Loop, the fountain,
Fine water in the mouth: everyone,
Tight inside his skin, thirsting
And taking what he can get of everything.
The woman lifts her head out of the fountain
And walks down the hall as through a picture
On fat legs ribbed with navy-blue veins.
Real. I bend to drink of her grief.
Men standing alone or in a group:
A Caesar at his forum,
Three on the curved corner
Cut a trinity to boredom.
I envy men standing around
Being — collars up, hands pocketed
Against activity, that elusive hound.
Yesterday, how contemplative a Pharaoh
High on a beggar’s pyramid of stairs
Stood rigid, his stone eyes lairs
Where the simple landscape burrowed.

Statues in the park in bronze battle poses
Tell little about the men or the ruses
Of the war that brought them finally
Home to these benches and to the stances
Of the sidewalk: the sight of a man
Just standing, bravely being
Neither hero nor Saint Francis.
Once delicate as morning kisses
Hermits on the shifting desert stood so,
Shy and covered over with their privacy.

Men standing on these passive corners bearing
The curses of the world and all its crooked courses,
Your pursuits are those of angels,
And saints and statesmen share your quiet virtues.
In a hospital somewhere in New York City
You were born howling
Into a subdued life.
Praises to the night that triggered you.
Praises to the womb that wore you.
This poem is gaudy with the bunting of birth.

Everything gets born.
Some scuttle from the sea
Bicarbonate with foam.
Some wriggle glistening
From their mothers, wet warm.
Some peck inside an egg
As knuckles rap a table.
Rap, tap, peck, crack.
Everything gets born.

Poems have birthdays too.
Sometimes in stages,
Sometimes in cages
Like a loud-mouthed bird.
Or a lily out of that mythical field:
They are from the first what they are or ever
will be.

A poem is an occasion that celebrates itself
As water fills a glass,
As a kiss fulfills the mouth.
Enough in a simple ceremony.
The poem is a game of catch
All morning the cat watches
The rhododendron leaves
Dangle on the stalks,
Brittle baseball gloves
That leather nothing in their palms.
The sun through the cold and dirty window
Decodes in brilliant islands on the table.
Swaying shadows are gentle birds
That call up from a tiger in the animal a disabled
Growl. The poem fingers the long flutes of light,
The baseball birds, the morning's flight.
Time is an italic on the table.

The waiting cat crouches, frantic
With ignorance, arranged
In a still life for this watch.
Issuing no answer to the question never posed,
The poem is a game of catch.
THREE LOVING POEMS

1. Saint Francis stands in the garden of the painting:
   “My heart, sweet Love, is empty as a cave.
   All I am crumbles into bread for birds.
   I look a brown jester, a tumbler of words.
   I juggle for you. You do not watch.
   If you are space only, then shape
   Some rare mist into the curve of this rock.”

2. Love is an umbrella.
   Under love’s ribs, there’s a little waning
   Circle of all around protection from itself.
   Love is what’s raining.

3. Love is a department store.
   Escalators and elevators,
   And soda in glasses with metal holders.
   Love is John Wanamaker’s.
   Through the Eighth St. subway exit
   You entered at Christmas to an organ
   Bellowing glories, and eighty countertenors
   Sang Joy, Joy to the World.
   Love was never so real as it is now
   Thinking that never was it so real
   As now, when it was never so real.
CLEOPATRA TO ANTONY

My heart is a city, love strolls in its suburbs.
Once the demeanor of love sent us reveling
Through Alex in clothes borrowed from three
Exporters, loitering like tourists as a rally.
We huddled in your cloak. I was nearly forty
And you were older. The glory of those weary
Nights is like a temple complex, all pole and wave
Covered with a sheet, under a canopy of love.

Memphis and Thebes scoop hollows out of the Old Kingdom.
In a barge on the Nile we made legend of the New.
One winter I called you to my dinner every other night
Where all the plate was gold, and pearls a melting weight
In our wine. Opposite nights I dined with you;
We drank and gossiped, and fished with it barely light.
You sent a boy, his body bait, beneath the dock
To hook fat fish on to your line’s sterile hook.

Later I tore my hair and shred my skin
Because they told me you were dead, but not
To appease them, Antony. I wanted no one to be kind
When under the intricate folds we were no longer able.
Love shouts curses at mere pleasantry. All is fable.
Only Alexandria, the port of strangers,
Scoops the bay to hunger. Love decorates the room.
My research of your body publicized our tomb.

I tell you, Antony, literature has inked out forgeries
Of me. But when I recall that old loose lore,
Then how it was, my spirit fleshes out to feel your left
Hand at my breast and your tongue’s rough sophistries.
Alexandria once harbored us as a winter’s booty.
Love still strolls in the suburbs of Cleopatra’s city.
TWO LOVERS ON THE TRAIN

Into the compartment of their sunny train
Two others, jouncing like strung monkeys, came
To lunch on pears and to watch with eager shame
Love darting eyeward and armward in mute refrain
Between two lovers, who had hoped to own
This square of whizzing world and cube of space
From Paris to Marseilles for their sweeter race
Of blood and flowering flesh and love alone.

But unalone, kissing the corners of their words,
They talked on talk, and fitfully resigned
Watched the stretched out world unwind
Until restraint bound them in its dim rewards.
The lovers, in sleep, fell away as rails
Do when one discovers their parallel infinity.
So lovers' finite arms uncoil in love's brevity
As sleep comes full round when passion fails,
And ties each separate with a eunuch's cords.

Now the squares, the squares and angles kiss:
Knees and elbows on this cutlass bench
Boxed up in love's paradox of French Railroad, schedule, caress — to sleep in this
Skeleton of selves, each incredibl y alone
As if they'd never once by fingertips,
Thigh on thigh, or lace of lips
Whispered the truths they here disown
Coupled in docile sleep at a child's tryst.
The first thrust of Adam
Into the desert of the world.
"Plow silt and sand, Adam,"
The angel heckled as he
Booted him from the lush garden
Where even the paths were loam.

How calm, how rough they both agreed
Hopping into the sloppy surf.

Men have stood so hearing their war
Commence: "Pontoon 9, on the beach."
Croaks and hushes on the crawl
To the calling shore. It is like
Being born to spill out into
A mess of weeds with stones
In your eyes.

The shore beheld us and we ducked.
Into a deep blue cabin. Watching
The beach from the pleasure boat
It looked a vaudeville. Arms were waving.
The scene was happy as a cracker:
Shrieks and the hoopla of summer.
The life guard blew his whistle.

We are bulging on the beach.
Each man, himself inside his trunks;
Each woman, buttocks, breast, and belly:
The essence of the sea that sways —
Pendulous, full up.
All the children, like marvelous dolls,
Are driving us crazy.
They dig deep holes in the sand
That fill with water. Even the castles level.

The fishermen come all dressed to the sea.
Their boots and hats suggest some inland meeting
As they sponge over the beach to the fanciful rocks.
Their walk no holiday stroll
Because they rush as grave lovers, rivals,
Toward a she whose only consolation
Is storm and rebuke.

Outside the lighthouse a rim of sand
Separates one country from another.
The sea with nowhere to go except toward
Retreats in a tide like a turtle into shell
To reappear, ugly perhaps, and greedy.
The beach is wet no matter what.
It is the month of revolutions.  
Men are turning in the sky.  
Somewhere someone makes a try  
For the moon. At the institutions  
Everyone's outside. It is July.  
The parades cast shadows after noon  
And sweep the armies like a broom  
That once collected them to die.

Everywhere one hears a marching tune —  
Along the Nile and Seine rivers  
And in Concord while the bridge quivers  
Men repay the men whose deaths were soon  
With gaudy and guns and a pause  
In the spine. Burning July brought  
Everything to this. Now caught  
In music, war is a noisy cause.

It is the month of revolutions.  
Men are turning in the sky.
AFTER THE SUMMER

The bugs in the air, gathered in a cloud,
Like minnows in the water,
Carry their property to death.
Birds bark, and the wet worms
Are drier than the leaves leaving
Their places on the emptying elms.
In the fall everything is brief,
Even the sun’s infrequent stare.
Tomatoes turn to rot
And the teeth on the corn blacken.
This churning world’s done it again.
We’ve seen it through and watched it slacken.
The tourist returns to find it a foreign country.
THE DEATH OF THE HUSBAND

Beside him, all his value there
Though leaking through his pores
Or out through tubes, those tunnels
To his grave, she watches him not sleep.
Why should he? His eyes are open,
His head turns to the wall with all
The valid tulips climbing on it.

Friendly
death
chews
on a straw.

The lid up
He poses in a mess of crinkled silk.
They have made a pretty man of him.
The flowers circle and sprawl, the box is big.
Looking in at this clean guy, this puffy doll,
She turns, alive, alive, to greet
A wall thick with curly iris, gauzy fern
Glad, glad that she looks in, she looks in.
DROWNING
(In memory of seventy-five men drowned aboard the submarine Affray in the English Channel one spring morning.)

When Caesar’s craft toppled and sank
Who bothered? Anyone?
It was a quiet procedure.
I doubt that Cleopatra shed any Shavian tears
When a Roman seaman slipped under some sprightly wave
And caused just the slightest tremor in a world not wholly hers.
But the Affray could not fall farther.
In a common casket, the silent seventy-five,
Wedged between rock and Norman treasure,
Lie snarled in the wild channel seizure
Under a greater conqueror than Caesar.

What of drowning? Though the craft be a canoe?
To dive deep in whirling water hurls the body
Down and under screeching pressure
Into a mocking green-grey pleasure.
Yet, a head held under thinks it torture.
Who of those on the valuable sea floor
Dying close by some imperial galleon
Knows, or knowing, seeks its lure?

All I know of bravery are some rather pleasant stories
From the Iliad.
I wonder if one of the Affray’s crew,
As his ship slipped slowly down
Like a broken and heroic snail,
Died with some other definition on his lips.
How right Mann was to call that story
"Death in Venice." What better place
For the mish-mash of final moments,
There where water divides soul from body, church from
hostel;
Structures like the separateness in that story.
I see those pole-vaulting chauffeurs sweep off
Their ludicrous hats as down and up those pastel corridors
His funeral floated:
His black and gold gondola going
Swish, swosh, swosh
Bound for the lidless Lido of the cemetery island.
To bring Aschenbach closer to some sleepier Tadzio?

No matter. All cemeteries are the same,
Here and there. Between Broad and Elmwood Sts.
Near Aunt Carrie’s neon’d nursing home
Or out in Gate of Heaven’s rarefied arena.
In each, symbiotic, the mounds,
Craning for escape, sink
Under the crown weight of those ridiculous stones.
Granted, death in Venice is quite ornate
Considering the final, festooned cruise
Along the Grand Canal to that somber island.
Still there are other absolutes and entities,
A bed for instance.

At times peopled, and now and then on fire.
Though that ultimate island
Will one furious dawn be as a sand beach
Absorbing the lap, lap, cool beseechings
Of your death.
Less ornate perhaps than that Venetian version
Yet here too the swish, swosh
Lap, lap.
I notice from the window of my car
this classical frieze against the leased sky:
a man sudden in Hadrian’s bearing
taut in sculptured robe,
one arm a rigid triangle of bent weight,
surveying this stone villa, his walled estate.

But here no Antinous slips his ringed fingers
through that vacant, elbowed hollow,
nor do the blurred outlines of his Rome deep
in the provincial valley elude or allow
him Hadrian’s sorrow, or decrease his peace.

Being completely at one with this or that
as he is with this grass, these flowers
is madness. Antinous in excess of joy
drowned himself, leaving Hadrian to shriek by the
tight-lipped Nile
until it spoke up that boy’s beloved body.

Riding by, seeing this swift effigy, an apron
his robe, light’s halo his laurel,
I think of spent, weary Hadrian
who as September sapped his summer away
must often have propped himself like this,
    vacant and whistling,
In his stone villa, this walled estate.
“Moon Believed to be Covered by Fuzz”
— headline, *N.Y. Times*, April 12, 1963

To get you in, I’ve called this that.
High in a tree the bird cackles,
Not at the funny ruse
But because it is safe
Or hungry.
Along the edges of the grass
Blades entangle making arches
For the ants for whom it’s a forest,
Or the new moon muddled with
Green debris.
Something is very fuzzy
Way out there.
The dining room laps over the edge,
A napkin over the rock.
Tilted toward Block Island
The tip of lawn slopes, leaps
In gulls of green
From here, the dark bedroom,
Where I have caught the moon
Mimicking birds on the water.
Once when the windows were very clean
I watched Eldorado map out
Of the sea to ebb into the parlor —
Massive, sandy, a mirage on the rug.
Only Noah all that time in the wooden ark
Dribbling porter over the waters of the world
Understood how the looking out encloses you.
WHAT TIME?

The wheel, the plow
happened,
possibly on a Friday.
Events happen.
They do not begin.

That old woman
thumping down the road
happens along.
She happens to me,
and I am as though
it rained forever.
HE HAS NO PERSONAL LIFE

Pedaling down the primitive road,
Pushing, pumping in a whiz,
He has no personal life.
The trees mesh above, so underneath
Night and day splatter on the ground
Shaping a dapple tent over the cruising man.
Under his hat, so camouflaged,
He merges with the road to color with the land.
Such signals in an hour: mailbox,
Fence, cow, tractor, bicycle with man
Flick onto the retina’s clean spaces.

As the pattern from the trees tells
Nothing for a page, so this cycling man
Enters the mind as sun might.
He has no personal life.
FOUR MARCHING SONGS
FOR JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY

1. for drums

A surplus gun: boom, then boom, then boom. The day cracked, flags fell, feet followed To the low rumpty-dum of the drums. Deep trouble on the skin of the land, Deep in the dark of Dixie, And in Dallas, alas.

Trouble in November, Erosion in the soil. Grumbles, deep rumbling in the earth. Staccato, erratic, muffled sound; The black and the white wriggle in crevices. The war is that is no war but worse.
2. *for bagpipe*

A Democrat air:
It's
The braying of donkeys.
O-e, O-e
Diddle-i, diddle-i.
Wheezing,
Swish of kilt;
Whining,
Bellowing
Melody.
Their
Whimsey.

Ireland grieves for the lad:
Quench his light,
Wind at his back,
A song for his pocket.

O the pipers
Are grave
Despite diddle-i.
3. for brass

Malice in Dallas.
A massacre in Africa.
Eternal Father, Strong to Save.

Holy, Holy, Holy
God of the Armies,
Colonels and Generals,
Hail to the Chief.
Round as their metal
The instruments sound.
Kings sweep down Pennsylvania,
Baudouin of Belgium, Haile Selassie,
De Gaulle in his soldier’s suit.

Shots from Jack Ruby.

Slide the trombones,
Blow hard through the tuba.
When there are happy days again.
Brass will elect.
4. for flute
The flags catch and the color of the wind

Flutes flute.
Whistling men
In the white city,
Frozen, alive
On stiff sidewalks,
Sound this sad story.

Down obese avenues
Fat with misfortune,
The widows of men,
The children they bore them,
Mash toward the caisson.
Flutes follow their sorrow.

Then the Potomac,
Low in its valley
Drilling its silver
Through the lawn of the dead.

Deep, deep you go
Under the taut skin
Of the brown soil.
Twenty-one guns.
Shrill is the end.
Now to his trumpet.
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