

When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed, Ray Bradbury

This One To The Memory Of my grandmother Minnie Davis Bradbury and my grandfather Samuel Hinkston Bradbury, and my brother Samuel and my sister Elizabeth Jane, long lost in the years but now remembered.

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 Remembrance

 And this is where we went, I thought,

 Now here, now there, upon the grass

 Some forty years ago.

 I had returned and walked along the streets

 And saw the house where I was born

 And grown and had my endless days.

 The days being short now, simply I had come

 To gaze and look and stare upon

 The thought of that once endless maze of afternoons.

 But most of all I wished to find the places where I ran

 As dogs do run before or after boys,

 The paths put down by Indians or brothers wise and swift

 Pretending at a tribe.

 I came to the ravine.

 I half slid down the path

 A man with graying hair but seeming supple thoughts

 And saw the place was empty.

 Fools! I thought. O, boys of this new year,

 Why don’t you know the Abyss waits you here?

 Ravines are special fine and lovely green

 And secretive and wandering with apes and thugs

 And bandit bees that steal from flowers to give to trees.

 Caves echo here and creeks for wading after loot:

 A water-strider, crayfish, precious stone

 Or long-lost rubber boot—

 It is a natural treasure-house, so why the silent place?

 What’s happened to our boys they now no longer race

 And stand them still to contemplate Christ’s handiwork:

 His clear blood bled in syrups from the lovely wounded trees?

 Why only bees and blackbird winds and bending grass?

 No matter. Walk. Walk, look, and sweet recall.

 I came upon an oak where once when I was twelve

 I had climbed up and screamed for Skip to get me down.

 It was a thousand miles to earth. I shut my eyes and yelled.

 My brother, richly compelled to mirth, gave shouts of laughter

 And scaled up to rescue me.

 “What were you doing there?” he said.

 I did not tell. Rather drop me dead.

 But I was there to place a note within a squirrel nest

 On which I’d written some old secret thing now long forgot.

 Now in the green ravine of middle years I stood

 Beneath that tree. Why, why, I thought, my God,

 It’s not so high. Why did I shriek?

 It can’t be more than fifteen feet above. I’ll climb it handily.

 And did.

 And squatted like an aging ape alone and thanking God

 That no one saw this ancient man at antics

 Clutched grotesquely to the bole.

 But then, ah God, what awe.

 The squirrel’s hole and long-lost nest were there.

 I lay upon the limb a long while, thinking.

 I drank in all the leaves and clouds and weathers

 Going by as mindless

 As the days.

 What, what, what if? I thought. But no. Some forty years beyond!

 The note I’d put? It’s surely stolen off by now.

 A boy or screech-owl’s pilfered, read, and tattered it.

 It’s scattered to the lake like pollen, chestnut leaf

 Or smoke of dandelion that breaks along the wind of time…

 No. No.

 I put my hand into the nest. I dug my fingers deep.

 Nothing. And still more nothing. Yet digging further I brought forth:

 The note.

 Like mothwings neatly powdered on themselves, and folded close

 It had survived. No rains had touched, no sunlight bleached

 Its stuff. It lay upon my palm. I knew its look:

 Ruled paper from an old Sioux Indian Head scribble writing book.

 What, what, oh, what had I put there in words

 So many years ago?

 I opened it. For now I had to know.

 I opened it, and wept. I clung then to the tree

 And let the tears flow out and down my chin.

 Dear boy, strange child, who must have known the years

 And reckoned time and smelled sweet death from flowers

 In the far churchyard.

 It was a message to the future, to myself.

 Knowing one day I must arrive, come, seek, return.

 From the young one to the old. From the me that was small

 And fresh to the me that was large and no longer new.

 What did it say that made me weep?

 I remember you.

 Iremember you.

 PRETEND AT BEING BLIND,

Which Calls Truth Near

 The backyard of my mind is filled this summer morning

 With a soft and humming tide

 The gentle glide and simmer, the frail tremoring

 Of wings invisible which pause upon the air,

 Subside, then come again at merest whisper

 To the lip of flower, to the edge of wonder;

 They do not tear asunder, their purpose simple

 Is to waken me to wander without looking

 Never thinking only feeling;

 Thoughts can come long after breakfast….

 Now’s the time to press the air apart

 And stand submerged by pollen siftings

 And the driftings of those oiled and soundless wings

 Which scribble waves of ink and water

 Flourished eye-wink fluttering and scurry

 Paradox of poise and hurry,

 Standing still while spun-wound-bursting to depart,

 Swift migrations of the heart of universe

 Which surfs the wind and pulses awe;

 Thirsting bird or artful thought the same,

 Sight, not staring, wins the game,

 Touch but do not trap things with the eyes,

 Glance off, encouraging surprise;

 Doing and being… these the true twins of eternal seeing.

 Thinking comes later.

 For now, balance at the equator of morn’s midnight

 With wordless welcome, beckon in the days

 But shout not, nor make motion,

 Tremble not the sea nor ocean of being

 Where thoughts in rounded flight fast-fleeing

 Stone-pebble-skip

 Across the surface of calm mind;

 Pretend at being blind which calls truth near….

 Until the hummingbirds,

 The hummingbirds,

 The humming—

 —birds

 Ten billion gyroscopes,

 Swoop in to touch,

 Spin,

 Whisper,

 Balance,

 Sweet migrations of gossip in each ear.

 THE BOYS ACROSS THE STREET

 ARE DRIVING MY YOUNG DAUGHTER MAD

 The boys across the street are driving my young daughter mad.

 The boys are only seventeen,

 My daughter one year less,

 And all that these boys do is jump up in the sky

 and

 beautifully

 finesse

 a basketball into a hoop;

 But take forever coming down,

 Their long legs brown and cleaving on the air

 As if it were a rare warm summer water.

 The boys across the street are maddening my daughter.

 And all they do is ride by on their shining bikes,

 Ashout with insults, trading lumps,

 Oblivious of the way they tread their pedals

 Churning Time with long tan legs

 And easing upthrust seat with downthrust orchard rumps;

 Their faces neither glad nor sad, but calm;

 The boys across the street toss back their hair and

 Heedless

 Drive my daughter mad.

 They jog around the block and loosen up their knees.

 They wrestle like a summer breeze upon the lawn.

 Oh, how I wish they would not wrestle sweating on the green

 All groans,

 Until my daughter moans and goes to stand beneath her shower,

 So her own cries are all she hears,

 And feels but her own tears mixed with the water.

 Thus it has been all summer with these boys and my mad daughter.

 Great God, what must I do?

 Steal their fine bikes, deflate their basketballs?

 Their tennis shoes, their skin-tight swimming togs,

 Their svelte gymnasium suits sink deep in bogs?

 Then, wall up all our windows?

 To what use?

 The boys would still laugh wild awrestle

 On that lawn.

 Our shower would run all night into the dawn.

 How can I raise my daughter as a Saint,

 When some small part of me grows faint

 Remembering a girl long years ago who by the hour

 Jumped rope

 Jumped rope

 Jumped rope

 And sentme weeping to the shower.

 AND FRIEND TO NOAH, SPEAKS HIS PIECE

 At night he swims within my sight

 And looms with ponderous jet across my mind

 And delves into the waves and deeps himself in dreams;

 He is and is not what he seems.

 The White Whale, stranger to my life,

 Now takes me as his writer-kin, his feeble son,

 His wifing-husband, husband-wife.

 I swim with him. I dive. I go to places never seen,

 And wander there, companion to a soundless din

 Of passages, of currents, and of seas beneath a sea.

 I linger under, down, and gone until the dawn;

 Then, with a lumbering of flesh, old Moby turns him round,

 Peers at me with a pale, lugubrious eye.

 As if to say: God pinions thee,

 Your soul against your flesh, your flesh against the sea,

 The sea nailed down to land in passionate lashings of its stuff.

 You are mere snuff, I sneeze thee!

 You are the snot of Time, but, once exhaled, O, Miracles!

 You build a spine and stand you tall and Name Yourself.

 What matters it the name. You are my sequel on the earth.

 The sea is mine. The land belongs to you.

 All compass themselves round in one electric view.

 I am the greatest soul that ever ventured here,

 But now your soul is greater, for itknows,

 And knows that it knows that it knows.

 I am the exhalation of an end.

 You are the inhalation of a commencement of a beginning,

 A flowering of life that will never close.

 I stay in waters here and salt myself with tides

 For dinners of eternity to eat me up

 While your soul glides, you wander on,

 You take the air with wings,

 Test fires, roar, thrash, leap upon the Universe Itself!

 And, breathing, move in breathless yammerings of broadcast Space.

 Among the energies of abyss-void you bound and swim

 And take a rocket much like me

 The White Whale builded out of steel and loxxed with energy

 And skinned all round with yet more metal skin

 And lit within and filled with ventings of God’s shout.

 What does He say?

 Run away. Run away.

 Live to what, fight?

 No. Live to live yetmore, another day!

 Stay not on tombyard Earth where Time proclaims:

 Death! Death to Moby! Clean his polar bones!

 Doom to the White Whale!.

 Sail on. Who was it said that? Sail, sail on, again,

 Until the earth is asterisk to proclamations

 Made by God long years before a Bible scroll

 Or ocean wave unrolled,

 Before the merest sun on primal hearth was burned

 And set to warm the Hands Invisible.

 I stay, I linger on, remain;

 Upon my rumpled brow my destiny is riven deep

 In hieroglyphs by hammerings of God

 Who, ambled on my head, did leave his mark.

 I am the Ark of Life!

 Old Noah knew me well.

 Do not look round for ruins of an ancient craft,

 I kept his seed, his love, his wild desires by night,

 His need.

 He marched his lost twinned tribes of beasts

 Two and two and two within my mouth;

 Once shut, there in the Mediterranean north,

 I took me south,

 And waited out the forty days for dove to touch my skin

 And tell by touching: Earth has perished. Earth is washed

 As clean as some young virgin’s thighs from old night and sin.

 Noah looked out my eye and saw the bird aflutter there

 With green of leaf from isle somewhere at sea.

 I swam me there and let them forth

 Two by two, two by two, two by two,

 O how they marched endlessly.

 I am the Ark of Life. You be the same.

 Build you a fiery whale all white…

 Give it my name.

 Ship with Leviathan for forty years

 Until an isle in Space looms up to match your dreams,

 And land you there triumphant with your flesh

 Which works in yeasts, makes wild ferment,

 Survives and feeds

 On metal schemes;

 Step forth and husband soil as yet untilled,

 Blood it with your wives, sow it with seeds,

 Crop-harvest it with sons and maiden daughters,

 And all that was begat once long ago in Earth’s strange waters

 Do recall.

 The White Whale was the ancient Ark, You be the New.

 Forty days, forty years, forty hundred years,

 Give it no mind;

 You see. The Universe is blind.

 You touch. The Abyss does not feel.

 You hear. The Void is deaf.

 Your wife is pomegranate. The stars are lifeless bereft.

 You smell the wind of Being.

 On windless worlds the nostrils of old Time are stuffed

 With dust and worse than dust.

 Settle it with your lust, shape it with your seeing.

 Rain it with sperming seed,

 Water it with your passion,

 Show it your need.

 Soon or late,

 Your mad example it may imitate.

 And gone and flown and landed there in White Whale craft,

 Remember Moby here, this dream, this Time which does suspire,

 This kindling of your tiny apehood’s fire;

 I kept you well. I languish and I die.

 But my bones will timber out fresh dreams,

 My words will leap like fish in new trout streams

 Cone up the hill of Universe to spawn.

 Swim o’er the stars now, spawning man

 And couple rock, and break forth flocks of children on the plains

 Of nameless planets which will now have names,

 Those names are ours to give or take,

 We out of Nothing make a destiny

 With one name over all

 Which is this Whale’s, all White.

 I you begat.

 Speak then of Moby Dick,

 Tremendous Moby, friend to Noah.

 Go now.

 Ten trillion miles away.

 Ten light-years off.

 See! from your whale-shaped craft:

 That glorious planet!

 Call it Ararat.

 WHEN ELEPHANTS LAST

 In The Dooryard Bloomed

 When elephants last in the dooryard bloomed

 Brought forth from dusts and airing attics where they roomed

 For many a year and faded out the roses on their flanks

 And sucked the dust and trod the ancient grass in ranks

 Beyond our seeing, deep in jungles on our parlor floor,

 These old familiar beasts we led into the light

 And beat upon their pelts and hung them in the sight of sun

 Which glorious made the panoplies of thread.

 What grandeur here!

 What pomp of Hannibal and Rome and Alps,

 Egyptian cerements and tombs, Troy’s ruins, Delphic glooms—

 Across such arabesques as these once walked Victoria.

 Now in the lost great animal boneyard these lively skins are stretched,

 Unravel, fall to pollen and to rust.Sic transit gloria.

 All this has passed, is dim as ill-recalled rococo

 But in my youth I stomped out cinnamons from these

 God-awful paths and raised up such a flour of scents

 As would reel down kings and make rise up to kingship

 Lunatic lepers and foul penitents.

 Old creatures, slung upon a wire in wind and light

 And years’ ebbtide

 I beat you gently with my howdah wire-racket beater,

 Search tigers in the shade of your deep hills

 And stand, a monarch made, along your blind impatient old

 And slumbrous side,

 And know that modern carpetings and rugs, so bland, so broad

 So nothing, and so shallow

 Were made for snails

 And men who breakfast, lunch, and dine

 Upon the safe, sure, ever-recurring marshmallow.

 Still somewhere in this world

 Do elephants graze yards?

 In far towns toward the East and North toward Michigan

 Do grandmothers and boys go forth to lawns,

 And lines strummed there ‘twixt oak or elm and porch,

 And tie thereon great beasts of Indian grace

 Loomed taller than their heads?

 Still on such days do heartbeats throng the town

 Where elderwitch and tads,

 Where toms and great-grand-crones gone feverish with sweat

 Goad Time out of the warp and weave,

 The tapestry of treaded hearthwarm woolen flesh,

 Beat Time into the breeze and watch the billion footfalls

 Sift clouds into the greening insufferable beauty of young trees?

 Do old and young still tend a common ground?

 Vast panoply and firewalk spread of God’s most patient brute

 Whose firecoal eyes observe and well-worn hide

 Now feels the woman tire, so Boy takes up the beat:

 Where one thump dies, another heart begins.

 Along the cliff of dusty hide

 From either end, with centuries between as well as miles,

 Old looks to young, young looks to old

 And, pausing with their wands,

 Trade similar smiles.

 DARWIN, THE CURIOUS

 Old Curious Charlie

 He stood for hours

 Benumbed,

 Astonished,

 Amidst the flowers;

 Waiting for silence,

 Waiting for motions

 In seas of rye

 Or oceans of weeds—

 The stuff on which true astonishment feeds—

 And the weeds that fed and filled his silo

 With a country spread

 By the pound or kilo,

 Of miracles vast or microscopic,

 For them, by night, was he the topic?

 In conversations of rye and barley,

 Didthey stand astonished

 By Curious Charlie?

 DARWIN, IN THE FIELDS

 Darwin, in the fields, stood still as time

 And waited for the world to now exhale and now

 Take in a breath of wind from off the yield and swell

 Of sea where fill the clouds with sighs;

 His eyes knew what they saw but took their time to tell

 This truth to him; he waited on their favor.

 His nose kept worlds far larger than a goodly nose might savor

 And waited for the proper place to fit the flavor in.

 So eye and nose and ear and hand told mouth

 What it must say;

 And after a while and many and many a day

 His mouth,

 So full of Nature’s gifts, it trembled to express,

 Began to move.

 No more a statue in the field,

 A honeybee come home to fill the comb,

 Here Darwin hies.

 Though to ordinary eyes it might appear he plods,

 Victorian statue in a misty lane;

 All that is lies. Listen to the gods:

 “The man flies, I tell you. The man flies!”

 DARWIN, WANDERING HOME AT DAWN

 Darwin, wandering home at dawn,

 Met foxes trotting to their lairs,

 Their tattered litters following,

 The first light of the blood-red sun adrip

 Among their hairs.

 What must they’ve thought,

 The man of fox,

 The fox of man found there in dusky lane;

 And which had right-of-way?

 Did he or they move toward or in or

 On away from night?

 Their probing eyes

 And his

 Put weights to hidden scales

 In mutual assize,

 In simple search all stunned

 And amiable apprize.

 Darwin, the rummage collector,

 Longing for wisdom to clap in a box,

 Such lore as already learned and put by

 A billion years back in his blood by the fox.

 Old summer days now gone to flies

 Bestir themselves alert in vixen eyes;

 Some primal cause

 Twitches the old man’s human-seeming paws.

 An ancient sharp surmise is melded here

 And shapes all Dooms

 Which look on Death and know it.

 Darwin all this knows.

 The fox knows he knows.

 But knowing is wise not to show it.

 They stand a moment more upon the uncut lawn.

 Then as if by sign, quit watchfulness;

 Each imitates the other’s careless yawn.

 And with no wave save pluming tail of fox and kin

 Away the creatures go to sleep the day,

 Leaving old Charlie there in curious disarray,

 His hair combed this, his wits the other way.

 So off he ambles, walks, and wanders on,

 Leaving an empty meadow,

 A place

 Where strange lives passed…

 And dawn.

 EVIDENCE

 Basking in sun,

 Age 37, mid-Atlantic, on a ship,

 And the ship sailing west,

 Quite suddenly I saw it there

 Upon my chest, the single one,

 The lonely hair.

 The ship was sailing into night.

 The hair waswhite…

 The sun had set beyond the sky;

 The ship was sailing west,

 And suddenly, O God, why, yes,

 I felt, I knew…

 So was I.

 TELLING WHERE THE SWEET GUMS ARE

 Even before you opened your eyes

 You knew it would be one of those days.

 Tell the sky what color it must be,

 And it was indeed.

 Tell the sun how to crochet its way,

 Pick and choose among leaves

 To lay out carpetings of bright and dark

 On the fresh lawn,

 And pick and choose it did.

 The bees have been up earliest of all;

 They have already come and gone

 and come and gone again

 to the meadow fields

 and returned

 all golden fuzz upon the air

 all pollen-decorated, epaulettes at the full,

 nectar-dripping.

 Don’t you hear them pass?

 hover?

 dance their language?

 telling where the sweet gums are,

 The syrups that make bears frolic and lumber in bulked ecstasies,

 That make boys squirm with unpronounced juices,

 That make girls leap out of beds to catch from the corners of their eyes

 Their dolphin selves naked

 aflash

 on the warm air

 Poised forever in one

 Eternal

 Glass

 Wave.

 EMILY DICKINSON, WHERE ARE YOU?

 HERMAN MELVILLE CALLED YOUR NAME

 LAST NIGHT IN HIS SLEEP!

 What did he call, and what was said?

 From the sleep of the dead, from the lone white

 Arctic midnight of his soul

 What shy albino mole peered forth and gave a cry?

 Or was it just the wind asifting through the winter screens

 Upon the attic windows

 Where the dust looks out at dew on empty lawns?

 Or did the dawn mist find a tongue

 And issue like his mystic seaport tides

 From out his mouth while, all-unknowing, drowned, he slept

 And dreamed on… Emily?

 O what a shame, that these two wanderers

 Of threeA.M. did not somehow contrive

 To knock each other’s elbows drifting late

 On sidewalks-vast inhabited by only leaves

 And mice and tracks of silver from lost hieroglyphic snails.

 How sad that from a long way off these two

 Did not surprise each other’s ghosts,

 One sailing lawns, the other ocean storms,

 Strike up a conversation out of single simple words,

 Alarms repeated and re-echoed, and so make up a life

 From halves which separated long before the oceans rolled

 Still sought each other, but in different towns.

 Un-met and doomed they went their ways

 To never greet or make mere summer comment

 On her attic mothball or his sea-dog days.

 Death would not stop for her,

 Yet White graves yawned for him,

 Each loved one half of that which, grim, enticed and beckoned,

 Yet neither reckoned it as half a life for each;

 With sudden reach they might have found

 Each other and in meld and fuse and fusion

 Then beheld between the two, two halves of loving Life,

 And so made one!

 Two halves of sun

 To burn away two halves of misery and night,

 Two souls with sight instead of tapping

 Long after midnight souls skinned blind with frost,

 Lost minds turned round-about to flesh,

 Instead of lonely flesh, for lack of company,

 Alone with mind.

 But, then, imagine, whatdoes happen when some ghost

 Of quiet passes and in passing nudges silence?

 Does his silence know her vibrant quiet there

 All drifting on the walk with leaves and dust?

 It must. Or so the old religions say.

 Thus forests know themselves and know the fall

 Of their own timbers dropping in the unseen,

 And so non-existent, wood;

 Such things should hear themselves

 And feel, record, and ridge them in their souls—

 And yet…?

 I really wonder if some night by chance

 Old Herman and that lost and somehow always old dear Emily

 Out late and walked five hundred miles in dreams

 Might not have made some lone collision

 At a crossroads where the moon was lamp

 And trees were winter sentry to their soft encounter there.

 One pale gaze finds the other,

 One blind hand stutters forth to reach and touch the air,

 His wry hand comes the other way,

 So frail the night wind trembles it,

 Both shake as candles shake their fires

 When old time turns ashuttle in its sleep.

 The houses keep their shutters down.

 The moon expires. The sidewalk ghosts remain

 And, touching palms, at last walk almost but not quite

 Arm in arm, soul hungering soul, away, away

 Toward loss of midnight, toward gain of fog and mist

 And day.

 So walk they round the buried town all night.

 Seeing their spectral shadows in the cold shop window glass,

 Bleak mariner and odd mothball closet attic maiden lass.

 No word they speak, nor whisper, nor does breath

 Escape their nostrils, but they share

 A strange new sense of being, everywhere they wander, go.

 No thought, no word is said of dining,

 Yet in the middle of a midnight pond of grass they do

 Toss down their souls

 And bring some wild thing up that writhes and gasps

 And dances in their arms and is all shining.

 Then on through night the love-drunk strangers browse

 And in conniption clovers do their fevers douse.

 Thus round the courthouse square

 Where Civil cannons boom beneath their breath

 And on to country lanes where ancient death

 Keeps syllables on stones, those unseen words

 That only sound from graveyard birds.

 And stop at some sweet dark orchard yard

 Where, panics stifled, ancient Melville skins on up

 With gouty reach

 To bring and offer, peel and eat

 Some last lone sexual-pectin-covered farewell summer peach.

 So nibbling in silence, mouths covered with gums,

 Hands counting and touching and softly adding odd sums

 Of affections —hips on occasion nudged in soft collisions,

 They go cupping and hugging and surprised by derisions

 And calamities of love, which in marrow and blood

 Fix secret alarms set to waken wild needs.

 And behind on the pavement leave trackings

 Of seeds from apple and pear and apricot and cherry,

 Wherever a farm offered food, their merry cries rose

 As Emily chose and advised and sent old Ahab ashore

 To come forth with his hands full of loot;

 The smell from his nostrils and mouth

 A whole summer of fruit.

 Then at the far end of the town

 They turn them round and make ready to depart forever,

 She on meadow concretes where no grass

 Obtrudes, seethes through,

 And he upon an ocean sea of rye and late-mown hay

 That takes him rudderless to break of day;

 He walks out in the tides, the grass foams round his feet,

 She with her skirts now glides and calmly cleans

 The leaves straight down the middle of this cold town’s street.

 Both turn but do not wave, look with their eyes,

 A look of love, a look of mad surmise?

 They cannot tell, they mirror each the other’s

 Lonely statue, one in fallow moonlake meadow lost,

 One like female dog who trots the night

 A thing of frost and mildewed echoes

 Where her feet set up a ricochet of battles

 Fought for no gain from both sides of the street.

 She dwindles, goes, is gone.

 He slowly sinks from sight in weed and briar

 And toadstool silages and dew.

 All silence is.

 All emptiness.

 And now:

 The dawn.

 O GIVE A FIG FOR NEWTON,

 PRAISE FOR HIM!

 Mad Isaac, snoozed beneath a tree,

 Was shaken by surprise;

 A sneeze of happenstance and fruit

 Knocked wide his eyes and sprang his wild thoughts free

 To watch the Force Invisible pluck apples down.

 From there, informed, he jogged about the town

 And told what he was bold to tell:

 Apples fall gladly, held in the spell of Force,

 With neither hesitation nor remorse.

 The Truth is this: They Fall.

 Friends listened, looked, and they themselves saw All.

 Glad Isaac, back beneath his tree

 Pressing old truths to new cider myth or scientific sauce,

 Hauled off and kicked to help the Yield, the Unseen Source.

 That last kick shook a billion seeds to fall;

 Thus Gravity, invisible till now, was found, revealed.

 Within the hour, ten thousand nimble scientists

 Dodged out to scowl beneath strange trees,

 Through orchard field they loped to sprawl,

 Waiting for ripe fruit or o’er-ripe Theory to fall.

 Apple or Isaac?

 Which did it matter?

 But in their secret, unscientific hearts—

 Preferably the latter.

 I WAS THE LAST, THE VERY LAST

 I was the last,

 The very last;

 You understand?

 No one else in all the land saw him as then I saw.

 They opened up the tomb a final time

 When I was nine

 And held me there and said:

 Look on him dead, boy, look, oh, look you well,

 So some day later on you then can tell,

 Describe, remember how it was.

 That’s Lincoln there,

 His face, his withered jackstraw bones;

 Within this case from which we lift the lid

 Is that beloved man.

 You be the final one,

 You young and fresh

 To see and memorize his ghosted flesh.

 So, look, ah sweet Christ, look,

 And print the backwall of your gaze

 With photographs to be immersed in fluid memory,

 Developed in your ancient days.

 I was the last!

 The very last to see him!

 There in Springfield’s keep

 One summer day

 They tacked and hammered, grunted, groaned

 To summon Lincoln from his sleep.

 So many robbers had come round

 To sack his soul;

 Many an odd and evil mole had burrowed hard

 To ransom forth his brow and beard and hand,

 And kidnap him who died so long before.

 So now upon this final day

 Before they locked and poured the concrete round

 And kept him really buried deep

 In his home farm and land

 A crowd had gathered to unpry his secret box of bones

 And look a lingering while on greatness gone to farewell summer,

 April’s promise lost in snow.

 All came, all gazed, to see, to know.

 I was the last to go.

 They held me high, a boy, they turned my head.

 I saw the man strewn lonely in his crypt.

 That’s him, they whispered, he who was shot,

 Old Gettysburg man, and Grant’s night-camp,

 Dawn damps at Shiloh,

 Gentle playmate of Tad;

 Look, boy, look! Slept away! Kept in sod.

 Jesus gentle his bones.

 Gone to God. Gone to God.

 Lincoln; what of him?

 What in all of this was his cold part?

 I thought I heard his icy heart start up

 As if my small fists, pounding it, had knocked an echo in the tomb!

 I thought I saw an old sad smile

 Re-etch itself around his mouth,

 A vagrant wisp, a tired nod,

 Acknowledgment that funeral trains and trips

 Were still ahead,

 And crowds by sidings in the noon-but-now-late day.

 But over all, I thought I heard him say

 Less than a dozen words, no more.

 Clear whispered, only I, leaned forward, heard.

 The words thus softly breathed upon my cheek

 Were, late remembered, funny, sad, or country-plain absurd.

 He spoke! I cried.

 He’s dead, the folks behind me tenderly explained,

 He died some forty years ago.

 Oh, no! Oh, no! He said! Not dead! Not dead!

 What?! cried the stunned people round-about.

 But I saw doubt in them and kept his words for me

 And just myself.

 I took them off and filed them on a country shelf

 And only on occasion in late years

 Took memory forth and heard again

 The old man’s sad odd prayer and rambling refrain.

 I looked a last time on his bones and parchment skin,

 They nailed the box flat shut

 And fixed one hundred tons of marble on his place.

 We walked away.

 Midnight stood amidst our unreal day.

 What said? what said?! were whispers all about,

 People clutching my elbows, touching my head,

 But I wanted to grieve alone and know what he said

 And understand; I brushed them aside and ran.

 And now, very old, some sixty years on,

 I sit up half the night and light a candle and look toward the tomb

 And remember the words that Lincoln whispered in that dusty room:

 I’m tired.

 I’m tired of the infernal buttoning and unbuttoning

 And the buttoning again.

 That’s what he said.

 An old farmer gone to law,

 Just simply fed and done with getting out of bed

 And washing up to start the day,

 Or washing up and going to sleep.

 He had had it with buttoning and unbuttoning,

 He was ready for clay.

 What did Lincoln say?

 That was it.

 To a boy in a marble tomb who was the last to see

 The look and shape and size of eternity

 And the man kept there.

 No vast grandiloquence, no sweeping phrase,

 No fourscore and seven years ago to warm my own late days

 But just his old bones tired

 And unslept by night prowling the White House rooms,

 Searching for dawn;

 An old man put out by dressing and undressing,

 Done with the whole nuisance,

 More than ready to be gone.

 So one night not so long ago I walked through midnight Springfield

 Thus to Lincoln’s tomb,

 And scanned the marbled syllables and great stone words,

 And took a crayon from my coat and in a scribbled trace,

 Upon the wall above his place,

 Where none but I might see,

 Wrote his last words to a boy held high to view his drowsy face,

 The last lone words that Abe would ever say:

 I’m tired.

 Tired of buttoning and unbuttoning

 And buttoning again.

 I smiled.

 Then, suddenly, suchmirth!

 I heard his slept bones laugh,

 And knock and shake warm harvest earth!

 I turned.

 I wept.

 I walked away.

 MAN IS THE ANIMAL THAT CRIES

 Man is the animal that cries;

 That sweet beast dumb in a wilderness of world

 Yet knows to weep

 And thus, astonished, finds those lost sea tides

 In rivulets from out his eyes and on his cheeks

 And thus to trembling hand.

 But is it elsewhere so?

 On far worlds do the inner-human outward-awful creatures go

 With such mute shivers in their blood

 That they must spring them forth,

 Deliver them in shudders and wild cries?

 Do their strange eyes leak sorrows to the day,

 Show weathers of the spirit and the soul?

 Confounded by the Universe, do they despair

 And wring their marrows and convulse those dread machines

 Of air and bone which, caught up in their skin,

 Would seem constructs of sin to us if we might see them?

 So we to them might seem a nightmare moth or poisonous fly

 Which hung upon an endless night in

 May Upon a most odd world

 Were better killed than left to fade away.

 No matter.

 Shapes are not the stuffs from which we humans run us up our dreams.

 No, in our strange genetics lie

 The circumstantial motes that hunger light

 And not to die but live beyond the Night.

 So all odd beasts on worlds which name themselves

 Most rare, most bright—which means a fair humanity—

 Share out their yellow suns and think on basking dusts

 And immortality.

 And if our shapes and sizes,

 Eyes and ears and warbling mouths

 Amuse or, gods! confuse us in their multiplicities,

 Get down to blood which, summoned by the heat,

 The sweet explosions of far suns,

 Did call us forth, some to a nightmare south,

 Some to a feared and awesome north.

 Aroused from most dissimilar slimes and primal mud,

 A fear of darkness pulses, looms, habituates our blood.

 Forever separate from them by 90 billion hours, years,

 Our need is theirs, theirs ours;

 We trade a fine supply of tears.

 And if the eye that sheds them, hand that finds them,

 Is disproportionate,

 Our wild fate is the same:

 To know the winds of dawn and fear the ever coming-on

 Of suns to dusk and worse than dusk… that Night

 Which threatens all our candles where we hearth our hands

 And cup our lives against a damping breeze.

 All walking—wounded shapes, to one another spider-apes

 Yet similar our fears.

 And so, ah, look!

 On old worlds light-years lost,

 Un-met,

 They weep! We weep! in funerals that sanctify and save,

 Thus daring to rebirth ourselves

 With simple gifts of tears.

 N

 O, Nemo, where’s your dream tonight?

 I used to dream of you in any moment I found right

 When I was ten;

 Behind my lids I’d rush across the world

 Then back again, knowing your death

 But hoping to find

 Somewhere the man whose ink of octopi

 Flourished in nights and dawns across my mind.

 I ached to make tomorrow dawn for you:

 That somehow underneath a polar sea on some strange afternoon

 I’d swim in diver’s suit and find

 A great White Shape,

 A long and dazzling iceberg fathoms deep

 That shoaled much like a whale.

 I’d crack its skin of ice! I’d break away the frost!

 To find within that chrysalis all safe and kept

 A ship we thought was lost:

 That lean submersible with fierce and awesome prow,

 And on it one initial: N!

 The billion waves that beat and tossed to rake this ship

 Have not erased this sign.

 Initial, craft, and what lies deep within the craft, are mine!

 I break the frosted seal.

 The airlock gapes.

 I enter there.

 I tread an ancient floor,

 Wondering at N for Nil for Naught,

 For Nothingness, or more?

 In mazed apartments, past untouched foods

 And unplayed organs now with stealth I go and find

 A man laid out on laboratory table frosted white

 And frozen so his lips, mouth, ears, eyes, soul are blind.

 I touch the white-tomb shape: it melts.

 The beard, the cheek, the brow, the mouth, the eye

 Come forth and flush, grow warm; they move,

 And such their fame, when asking I receive

 From one cold gasp that awful name,

 That name of beauty, that name of wrath and Time,

 Nemo! breaks forth from ice-crusted tongue!

 Nemo! makes frost and rime to fall and flake

 In syllables magnificent for my sweet sake!

 And (Renaissance from snow!) you rise to take me where

 All wild lost-wandered silly travel-romanced boys must go.

 Half blind you teach me how to see

 And hear the grindings of your dread machinery;

 They fill my soul. I burrow like a mole with you

 Beneath Mysterious Islands where you keep

 A hideaway or two or three.

 All madness maddened, like old Ahab,

 Tack and hammer we the bones and skin and heart

 Of circumnavigating Whale namedNautilus

 With which the two of us set sail,

 Wild Nemo, and wild half-constructed boy,

 The sea our bowl of soup, this iron whale our toy.

 We trough the world around and, hand in hand,

 Make Friday footprints on the sand of isles half coral

 And half sifting hour-glass dust.

 Your moral madness anchors us at yet much farther islands

 On a hunch,

 To run from cannibals who favor us for lunch

 And running laugh, for all of this is larks!

 We dive back in to breakfastings of sharks

 And sink us deep and keep us snug and warm,

 Thus hid and snug, we talk late in the night

 And plan for what? For all that’s Good and Right?

 Why, to Cure the World of War!

 That was your boast.

 Comparing madnesses, failed dreams, wild enterprise

 The sinking of a White Whale

 Or a warship by surprise,

 Ahab’s dread Bible-planned and heedless

 Self-destruction

 Or your lost reconstruction of our world and sphere?

 I think, old Nemo, I do love your madness most.

 Your aims are closer to the Host

 Whose Peace would walk upon your seas.

 Half out of sun, half into night,

 Your crooked shadow, leant toward goodness

 Seems half right. I fill the other half with me.

 O, gladly would I sail with Nemo

 Against the lords and brutes who breed annihilation,

 And live alone with you, our ship our nation.

 The N upon your prow which Nothing signifies,

 Your unshelled soul being raw, and empty now your cup,

 I would, with the numerals of my twelve brave years

 Fill up for you to drink, and again and again

 With loud sweet cries

 Fill up: Nemo! I say! And “You, R. B.!” your echoes sigh.

 All dreams must end.

 That dream is long since gone, I know,

 So from this unkempt world we turn and go

 ToNautilus, to deeps, to sleeping ice,

 To dreaming snow.

 There you to drowse and snooze a little hundred years or more

 Until some other aging boy cracks wide the seatide door

 And creeps to touch and whisper—waken you

 To rise from out the sea

 In hopeful times of Peace, eternally at ease,

 O,can it be?

 May it please God.

 No, more, may it please Man.

 It can be so if he but make the plan

 And sign it NEMO, for it was Nemo’s scheme

 To still the scarlet waters and fulfill Man’s dream.

 But there, bound up in whiteness and soon lost

 To sleep and time and winter’s mortal frost,

 Your lips, dear Captain, twitch a final gasp,

 I bend to catch your breath

 And hear you still outwhispering all tides, all death,

 And this your lasting cry:

 “Dear boy, with such good reading, dreamer lads like you,

 Why, bless me.NEMO! shout the name!

 Willnever die!”

 AIR TO LAVOISIER

 Lavoisier, when just a boy,

 Did suffer vital gas to joy;

 He’d snuff a lung, he’d sniff a quaff,

 Then let it forth, much changed, to laugh

 Which, echoed on the sides of seers

 Who had not laughed in sixty years,

 Convulsed their bones, ground them to dust

 In hyperventilated lust.

 And then, when grown, he sniffed the air,

 That vital flux which everywhere

 We lean upon with heart and lung,

 And readied up a tune which, sung,

 Changed Science’s antique brass band.

 Here’s Oxygen, he said,

 And on the other hand, here’s Hydrogen;

 They dance like gypsies down the strand

 And in our blood these twin stuffs caper,

 Half drunken gas, half flaming vapor.

 So said Lavoisier’s report;

 Then stopped, he took another snort,

 Cried, “Gods, one cannot get enough

 Of this invigorating stuff!”

 This secret to our Race bequeathing,

 All cheered. Forgot.

 But went on breathing.

 WOMEN KNOW THEMSELVES;

 ALL MEN WONDER

 Women know themselves;

 All men wonder.

 Women lie still with themselves;

 Men and dogs wander.

 Women appraise themselves;

 Men mustfind.

 Women have seeing eyes;

 Men are blind.

 Women stay, women are;

 Men would be, all men go yonder.

 Women walk quietly;

 Most men blunder.

 Women watch cool mirrors

 And there find mortal dust;

 Men crave fast creeks

 That break the sun and light

 And shimmer laughter and show no sight

 Save residues of lust;

 So it is women accept

 While men reject

 The night.

 Women bed down with child against the cold;

 Men drink to shake the winter lodged in summer bones

 Grow bold with beer

 And thus more certainly

 Grow old.

 When death sighs whitening the sill

 Women give way, cry welcome, stand still;

 But men run fast

 Thus racing for the hill

 Where all lie lonely under stones

 Where harvesters lie harvested by grass.

 In sum: it is man’s dear blind and blundered need

 And begging after life

 To break, to run, to leave;

 And woman’s to walk all warm with seed

 All lit by candle-children

 To look in midnight mirrors, finding truth,

 And, happy in late years, recall,

 And sometimes, grieve..

 DEATH IN MEXICO

 I thought it strange to see them on the path

 That led them up in sun and lemon-shadow

 Through winds that smelled of summer and of wine.

 I thought that they were only passing

 The delicate and fern-scrolled iron gates

 The winter-white, the marble cemetery

 Carrying their lunch in a little silver case.

 Murmuring, all,

 And chattering, and smiling;

 One held a soft guitar and touched it with a whorled thumb;

 And they were dark birds wheeling south at winter’s call

 I saw them chewing tangerines and spitting seeds,

 I saw them move, night among day-whitened stone.

 And the food that they ate upon was Death,

 And the sustenance they bore in a silver box

 Was the fossil imprint of a child.

 They carried her like jewels overhead;

 The father balanced her, hand up, gently as a plume,

 A crated feather, a valley flower, an April grass.

 And no one wept.

 But each was eating of the air and of the day,

 As quick, as quickly as they could.

 They ate the sky with eyes,

 And the wind with teeth,

 And the sun with their flesh;

 And it was good to be alive,

 If only to be walking here

 With Death crowned upon their heads,

 Death delicate as moss and leaf mold

 Borne in a box.

 Within the box was running and laughter and dark hair,

 Within the box was the eye of the antelope

 And the breath of the moon,

 Within the box a fevered but cooling apricot, a pear,

 Within the box all life that was or ever comes to be,

 Within the box some picnic tinsel, silver amulet, mountain shade.

 They moved on with their murmuring guitar,

 I saw the great fern shadows of the iron gate blow shut.

 How strange—I smiled—that I should think them picnicking,

 How strange to think they carried wine above their heads;

 For, in reality,

 Those souls were eating long before the noon

 And long after the midnight,

 They ate forever and never stopped their eating.

 Even as I, hurrying in an icy wind,

 Sculled down the quiet avalanche of cobbled street and hill

 Eating of the clear air, and drinking of the mellow wind,

 And eating of the blue sky

 And taking the golden dust with my mouth

 And feeding the yellow sun to my soul.

 I passed a coffin shop where hammers

 Were ticking like clocks.

 I woke in the night so hungry that I wept.

 ALL FLESH IS ONE;

 WHAT MATTER SCORES?

 The thing is this:

 We love to see them on the green and growing field;

 There passions yield to weather and a special time;

 There all suspends itself in air,

 The missile on its way forever to a goal.

 There boys somehow grown up to men are boys again;

 We wrestle in their tumble and their ecstasy,

 And there we dare to touch and somehow hold,

 Congratulate, or say: Ah, well, next time. Get on!

 Our voices lift; the birds all terrified

 At sudden pulse of sound, this great and unseen fount,

 Scare like tossed leaves, fly in strewn papers

 Up the wind to flagpole tops:

 We Celebrate Ourselves!

 We play at life, we dog the vital tracks

 Of those who run before and we, all laughing, make the trek

 Across the field, along the lines,

 Falling to fuse, rising amused by now-fair, now-foul

 Temper-tantrums, sprint-leaps, handsprings, recoils,

 And brief respites when bodies pile ten high.

 All flesh is one, what matter scores;

 Or color of the suit

 Or if the helmet glints with blue or gold?

 All is one bold achievement,

 All is a fine spring-found-again-in-autumn day

 When juices run in antelopes along our blood,

 And green our flag, forever green,

 Deep colored of the grass, this dye proclaims

 Eternities of youngness to the skies

 Whose tough winds play our hair and re-arrange our stars

 So mysteries abound where most we seek for answers.

 We do confound ourselves.

 All this being so, we do make up a Game

 And pitch a ball and run to grapple with our Fates

 On common cattle-fields, cow-pasturings,

 Where goals are seen and destinies beheld,

 And scores summed up so that we truly know a score!

 All else is nil; the universal sums

 Lie far beyond our reach,

 In this wild romp we teach our lambs and colts

 Ascensions, swift declines, revolts, wild victories,

 Sad retreats, all compassed in the round

 Of one October afternoon.

 Then winds, incensed and sweet with dust of leaves

 Which, mummified, attest the passing of the weather,

 Hour, day, and Old Year’s tide,

 Are fastened, gripped and held all still

 For just one moment with the caught ball in our hands.

 We stand so, frozen on the sill of life

 And, young or old, ignore the coming on of night.

 All, all, is flight!

 All loss and ept recovery.

 We search the flawless air

 And make discovery of projectile tossed

 The center of our being.

 This is the only way of seeing;

 To run half-blind, half in the sad, mad world,

 Half out of mind—

 The goal-line beckons,

 And with each yard we pass,

 We reckon that we win, by God, we win!

 Surely to run, to run and measure this,

 This gain of tender grass

 Is not a sin to be denied?

 All life we’ve tried and often found contempt for us!

 So on we hied to lesser gods

 Who treat us less as clods and more like men

 Who would be kings a little while.

 Thus we made up this mile to run

 Beneath a late-on-in-the-afternoon-time sun.

 We chalked aside the world’s derisions

 With our gamebook’s rulings and decisions.

 So divisions of our own good manufacture

 Staked the green a hundred yards, no more, no less.

 The Universe said “No”?

 We answered, running, “Yes!”

 Yes to Ourselves!

 Since naught did cipher us

 With scoreboards empty,

 Strewn with goose-egg zeros

 Self-made heroes, then we kicked that minus,

 Wrote in plus!

 The gods, magnanimous,

 Allowed our score

 And noted, passing,

 What was less is now, incredibly, more!

 Man, then, is the thing

 Which teaches zeros how to cling together and add up

 The cup stood empty?

 Well, now, look!

 A brimming cup.

 No scores are known?

 Then look down-field,

 There in the twilight sky the numbers run and blink

 And total up the years;

 Our sons this day are grown.

 Why worry if the board is cleared an hour from now

 And empty lies the stadium wherein died roars

 Instead of men,

 And goalposts fell in lieu of battlements?

 See where the battle turf is splayed

 Where panicked herds of warrior sped by,

 Half buffalo and half ballet.

 Their hoof marks fill with rain

 As thunders close and shut the end of day.

 The papers blow.

 Old men, half-young again, across the pavements go

 To cars that in imagination

 Might this hour leave for Mars.

 But, sons beside them silent, put in gear,

 And drive off toward the close of one more year,

 Both thinking this:

 The game is done.

 The game begins.

 The game is lost.

 But here come other wins.

 The band tromps out to clear the field with brass,

 The great heart of the drum systolic beats

 In promise of yet greater feats and trumps;

 Still promising, the band departs

 To leave the final beating of this time

 To older hearts who in the stands cold rinsed with autumn day

 Wish, want, desire for their sons From here on down, eternal replay on replay.

 This thought, them thinking it,

 Man and boy, old Dad, raw Son

 For one rare moment caused by cornering too fast,

 Their shoulders lean and touch.

 A red light stops them. Quiet and serene they sit.

 But now the moment is past.

 Gone is the day.

 And so the old man says at last:

 “The light is green, boy. Co. The light is green.”

 They ran together all the afternoon;

 Now, with no more words, they drive away.

 THE MACHINES, BEYOND SHYLOCK

 The Machines, beyond Shylock,

 When cut bleed not,

 When hit bruise not,

 When scared shy not,

 Lose nothing and so nothing gain;

 They are but a dumb show:

 Put Idiot in

 And the moron light you’ll know.

 Stuff right, get right,

 Stuff rot, get rot,

 For no more power lies here

 Than man himself has got.

 Man his energy conserves?

 Machineries wait.

 Man misses the early train?

 Then Thought itself is late.

 Sum totalings of men lie here

 And not the sum of all machines,

 This is man’s weather, his winter,

 His wedding forth of time and place and will,

 His downfall snow,

 The tidings of his soul.

 This paper avalanche sounds off his slope

 And drowns the precipice of Time with white.

 This tossed confetti celebrates his nightmare

 Or his joy.

 The night begins and goes and ends with him.

 No machinery opens forth the champagne jars of life.

 No piston churns the laundered beds to summon light.

 Remember this:

 Machines are dead, and dead must ever lie,

 If man so much as shuts up half one eye.

 THE BEAST UPON THE WIRE

 Suppose and then suppose and then suppose

 That wires on the far-slung telephone black poles

 Supped up the billion flooded words they heard

 Each night all night and saved the sense

 And meaning of it all.

 Then, jigsaw in the night, put all together,

 And in philosophic phrase

 Tried words like moron child,

 Numb-shocked electric idiot, mindless babe

 Alone upon its spider-threaded harpstrung poles,

 Incredulous of syllables that shimmer dazzle down

 Along swift thunder-lightning streams

 In sizzlings and fermentings of power.

 Thus mindless beast, all treasuring of vowels

 And consonants,

 Saves up a miracle of bad advice

 And lets it filter, seep, experiment,

 One hissing stutter heartbeat whisper at a time

 So one night soon someone in dark America

 Hears sharp bell ring, lifts phone

 And hears a voice like Holy Ghost gone far in nebulae—

 That Beast upon the wire,

 That pantomimes with lipless, tongueless mouth

 The epithets and slaverings of a billion unseen lovers

 Across continental madnesses of line in midnight sky,

 And with savorings and sibilance says:

 Hell… and then O.

 And then Hell-O.

 To such Creation—

 Such dumb brute wise Electric Beast,

 What is your wise reply?

 CHRIST, OLD STUDENT IN A NEW SCHOOL

 O come, please come, to the Poor Mouth Fair

 Where the Saints kneel round in their underwear

 And say out prayers that most need saying

 For needful sinners who’ve forgotten praying;

 And in every alcove and niche you spy

 The living dead who envy the long since gone

 Who never wished to die.

 Then, see the altar! There the nailed-tight crucifix

 Where Man in place of Christ gives up the ghost,

 And priests with empty goblets offer Us

 As Host to Jesus Who, knelt at the rail,

 Wonders at the sight

 Of Himself kidnapped off cross and Man nailed there

 In spite of all his cries and wails and grievements.

 Why, why, he shouts, these nails?

 Why all this blood and sacrifice?

 Because, comes from the belfries, where

 The mice are scuttering the bells and mincing rope

 And calling down frail Alleluias

 To raise Man’s hopes, said hopes being blown away

 On incensed winds while Christ waits there

 So long prayed to, He has Himself forgot the Prayer.

 Until at last He looks along a glance of sun

 And asks His Father to undo this dreadful work

 This antic agony of fun.

 No more! He echoes, too. No more!

 And from the cross a murdered army cries: No more!

 And from above a voice fused half of iron

 Half of irony gives Man a dreadful choice.

 The role is his, it says,

 Man makes and loads his own strange dice,

 They sum at his behest,

 He dooms himself.

 He is his own sad jest.

 Let go? Let be?

 Why do you ask this gift from Me?

 When, trussed and bound and nailed,

 You sacrifice your life, your liberty,

 You hang yourself upon the tenterhook.

 Pull free!

 Then suddenly, upon that cross immense,

 As Christ Himself gives stare

 Three billion men in one blink wide their eyes, aware!

 Look left! Look right!

 At hands, as if they’d never seen a hand before,

 Or spike struck into palm

 Or blood ad rip from spike,

 No! never seen the like!

 The wind that blew the benedictory doors

 And whispered in the cove and dovecot sky

 Now this way soughed and that way said:

 Your hand, your flesh, your spike,

 Your will to give and take,

 Accept the blow, lift hammer high

 And give a thunderous plunge and pound,/p>

 You make to die.

 You are the dead.

 You the assassin of yourself

 And you the blood

 And you the one Foundation Ground on which red spills

 You the whipping man who drives

 And you the Son who sweats all scarlet up the hills to Calvary!

 You the Crowd gathered for the thrill and urge

 You both composer and dear dread subject of the dirge

 You are the jailor and the jailed,

 You the impaler and you the one that your own

 Million-fleshed self in dreams by night

 Do hold in thrall and now at noon must kill.

 Why have you been so blind?

 Why have you never seen?

 The slave and master in one skin

 Is all your history, no more, no less,

 Confess! This is what you’ve been!

 The crowd upon the cross gives anguished roar;

 A moment terrible to hear.

 Christ, crouched at the rail, no more can bear

 And so shuts up His ears with hands.

 The sound of pain He’s long since grown to custom in His wits,

 But this! the sound of willful innocence awake

 To self-made wounds, these children thrown

 To Revelation and to light

 Is too much for His sanity and sight.

 Man warring on himself an old tale is;

 But Man discovering the source of all his sorrow

 In himself,

 Finding his left hand and his right

 Are similar sons, are children fighting

 In the porchyards of the void?!

 His pulse runs through his flesh,

 Beats at the gates of wrist and thigh and rib and throat,

 Unruly mobs which never heard the Law.

 He answers panic thus:

 Now in one vast sad insucked gasp of loss

 Man pries, pulls free one hand from cross

 While from the other drops the mallet which put in the nail

 Giver and taker, this hand or that, his sad appraisal knows

 And knowing writhes upon the crucifix in dreadful guilt

 That so much time was wasted in this pain.

 Ten thousand years ago he might have leapt off down

 To not return again!

 A dreadful laugh at last escapes his lips;

 The laughter sets him free.

 A Fool lives in the Universe! he cries.

 That Fool is me!

 And with one final shake of laughter Breaks his bonds.

 The nails fall skittering to marble floors.

 And Christ, knelt at the rail, sees miracle

 As Man steps down in amiable wisdom

 To give himself what no one else can give:

 His liberty.

 And seeing there the Son who was in symbol vast

 Their flesh and all,

 Hands Him an empty cup and bids Him drink His fill

 And Christ, gone drunk on laughter,

 Vents a similar roar,

 Three billion voices strong,

 That flings the bells in belfries high

 And slams then opens every sanctuary door;

 The bones in vaults in frantic vibrancy of xylophone

 Tell tunes of Saints, yes, Saints not marching in but out

 At this hilarious shout!

 And having given wine to dissolve thrice ancient hairballs

 And old sin,

 Now Man puts to the lips and tongue of Christ

 His last Salvation crumb,

 The wafer of his all-accepting smile,

 His gusting laugh, the joy and swift enjoyment of his image:

 Fool.

 It is most hard to chew.

 Christ, old student in a new school

 Having swallowed laughter, cannot keep it in;

 It works itself through skin like slivers

 From a golden door

 Trapped in the blood, athirst for air,

 Christ, who was once employed as single Son of God

 Now finds Himself among three billion on a billion

 Brother sons, their arms thrown wide to grasp and hold

 And walk them everywhere,

 Now weaving this, now weaving that in swoons,

 Snuffing suns, breathing in light of one long

 Rambled aeon endless afternoon….

 They reach the door and turn

 And look back down the aisle of years to see

 The rail, the altar cross, the spikes, the red rain,

 The sad sweet ecstasy of death and hope

 Abandoned, left and lost in pain;

 Once up the side of Calvary, now down Tomorrow’s slope,

 Their palms still itching where the scar still heals,

 Into the market where so mad the dances

 And the reels, Christ the Lord Jesus is soon lost

 But found again uptossed now here, now there

 In every multi-billioned face! There! See!

 Some sad sweet laughing shard of God’s old Son

 Caught up in crystal blaze fired out at thee.

 Ten thousand times a million sons of sons move

 Through one great and towering town

 Wearing their wits, which means their laughter,

 As their crown. Set free upon the earth

 By simple gifts of knowing how mere mirth can cut the bonds

 And pull the blood spikes out;

 Their conversation shouts of “Fool!”

 That word they teach themselves in every school,

 And, having taught, do not like Khayyam’s scholars

 Go them out by that same door

 Where in they went,

 But go to rockets through the roofs

 To night and stars and space,

 A single face turned upward toward all Time,

 One flesh, one ecstasy, one peace.

 The cross falls into dust, the nails rust on the floor,

 The wafers, half bit through, make smiles

 On pavements

 Where the wind by night comes round

 To sit in aisles in booths to listen and confess

 I am the dreamer and the doer

 I the hearer and the knower

 I the giver and the taker

 I the sword and wound of sword.

 If this be true, then let the sword fall free from hand.

 I embrace myself.

 I laugh until I weep

 And weep until I smile

 Then the two of us, murderer and murdered,

 Guilty and he who is without guile

 Go off to Far Centauri

 To leave off losings, and take on winnings,

 Erase all mortal ends, give birth to only new beginnings,

 In a billion years of morning and a billion years of sleep.

 THIS TIME OF KITES

 The day burns bright;

 The morning, clear,

 Has made its way to noon;

 And all that seems most special and most dear

 Is held encircled by the flaring sun itself.

 This weather is for kites

 Or earthborne people who

 Upon a hill string up their souls

 And send them flying in the glare

 That brings quick tears to eyes

 And warmth to hearts

 Which, knowing autumn,

 Feel the season change

 As birds fly north again

 Against the tide of time and time’s unreason.

 This weather is for children

 Or children-men who, melted by the sun,

 Find need for toys;

 Who stand like boys bedazzled by a sum,

 Who thrive on chalking life on hopscotch walks,

 Stand here, leap there, run fast, stand very still,

 But this now most of all: Be Much Alive.

 So in this time of kites,

 Autumnal springs, toys, men dwarved small again

 In the hot rain

 Of sunlight,

 Take this string,

 Let go with me, let fly the colored paper

 On November’s wind made March,

 And ask with me what color we have flown:

 Does Love put up such flags?

 And if so, are they white?

 Or colored like a hearth gone drowsed and sleepy warm

 Deep into night?

 Does lust fly high or low?

 Some one of us must know;

 In chorus, paired, or giving answer

 Simple and alone,

 Each calling out the color of the kite

 Which flies so high on this clear day ?

 Must name his own.

 IF YOU WILL WAIT JUST LONG ENOUGH,

 ALL GOES

 If you will wait just long enough, all goes;

 Young woman, if you wait, I’ll step away.

 O God, it may well take a dozen years,

 But finally my tears will dry, my passion wander off

 To dust itself in ancient dreams,

 My straight loins wither to dried plum,

 My words go dumb, adroit excuses for rare matinees

 Put unused tickets under pillows,

 If you wait long enough, dear one, yes, if you wait

 My gait and pace will surely slow.

 These are the penalties of age:

 That sweet rage dies, that shouts tide down to whispers

 And that whispers still themselves in flesh,

 That the cogs of love-mad beast no longer even try to mesh,

 That suddenly long morning sleeps and naps in afternoon

 Are much preferred to wrestling and to luncheon gymnast feats,

 That nibbled sweets of thigh no longer seem

 The center of the day. They simply idiot-maunder off away

 Leaving one stunned to wonder and to doubt.

 Why shout of jealousy, why envy of another’s size?

 What prize was that which lay beneath one’s chest?

 Why wrest such sweetmeats, why that young girl’s cries?

 Why melt her eyes and yours with happy tears,

 Why sighs and cheers and lamentations over endless brawls,

 Why squalls and calms, then fiercer storms of must,

 Why gusts of meat-machismo, mask-bravado, super-male?

 Why flail and torment, doubt: to seed or not to seed?

 Why endless need cupped close in need in nest of need?

 Sweet Christ, what was it all about?

 And was it Aristotle who awoke one morn,

 Looked down and gave a shout of glad release

 And ran to show the servants so they all might see,

 The pendant thing hung cold and not aroused,

 So down the chamber aisles he cried:

 “I’m free! O God, at last, I’m free!”

 Well, what a shame.

 Or, also, knowing lust, who can blame him?

 Yet, oh, it’s hard to think that one day all the gods

 Will truly pack, depart and leave Olympus in the rain,

 That falling down erosions will slide flesh

 To ruin in the dusk-lit sea,

 As even high gods sink and founder in the soul

 And vanish out of sight,

 So nights fill now with only dreams,

 Remembrance of a time when stallions pissed the air

 And brought the mares encircled to their thrust,

 When lust was every breath you gave or took,

 When earthquakes shook your flanks,

 And thrived her blooded subterrane with this and this

 and this!

 Again, again, again!

 No more.

 Whatwas all that?

 Now you, young woman,

 Lovely one curled there, cat-feet tucked under;

 Your rare June earth sweet-welcoming this wry

 November’s snow,

 You, now, you!

 What, what, oh, God, oh, what—

 (Help me remember!) please!

 What’s your name…?

 FOR A DAUGHTER, TRAVELING

 The child goes far in worlds within a world,

 The girl goes far in green within a green,

 That English land where all her blood was born

 And rivers run to sea in summers washed by rain and sun.

 My light and flesh look out her eye aware

 And live I in another time and splendid place;

 My face somewhat looks lost.

 And hidden from within her face,

 And mingled there, my awe and ingasped worshipping

 Do travel far because of her…

 I visit there with grace,

 I know the crossroads of all time,

 I wander where the weather is both cold and warm.

 To wake at nights near Blenheim where the storm

 Is like old battles and artilleries drowned deep

 In leafage from another year;

 I gather flowers by serenities of stream

 And touch old stones gone green with velveteens of moss,

 Soft edge to granite toothings of an ancient dream.

 I stay, I go, one flesh is here, the other wanders there,

 My older self kept spelled by California airs

 My younger, garden-lost in Britain’s maze,

 But what a joy such days of lostness be!

 How wondrous to be lovely-puzzled endlessly!

 The sum and thought is good: that even when I stay I go,

 Gone quiet here, my other self

 Stands even much more silent still,

 That one more mystery of myself,

 That girl run round the wide circumference of earth

 Dares take a step, a step, another step,

 And then, behold!

 All that was gray at sunset

 Mints itself to gold;

 All that was cold

 Is for a moment, on the hearth of evening, kindled warm.

 This self, stayed here, calls out a prayer

 And asks a promise from the world:

 To keep my other lost and wandering self from harm.

 OLD MARS, THEN BE A HEARTH TO US

 Why, damn it all,

 You once werefull of life!

 It dripped and fell from off your ruddy edges into Space!

 Long years before our time

 When dreaming tribes of men lurched in dim caves

 And burnt their paws at fires newly made,

 They eyed your blazing shape far up the sky

 October nights and wondered what you were.

 The Greeks, they wondered too,

 And so along the line to men who grouped

 With Galileo or some-such

 Confirmed or dis-established you.

 While authors, later on, competed to outfit your latitudes

 And longitudes with peoples some bleached fair

 And others green,

 And some with gills, by God, and others saffron gone astride

 Rare beasts with spider legs;

 Some hatched from eggs because dear Mr. Burroughs wrote it so!

 While others snatched quadruple swords,

 One for each arm and hand.

 Great gods in multiples, oh what a land you were,

 Yes, what a land! We all of us, as boys, stretched minds in orchestras of need,

 First one, and then another and another

 So, signaling, we hoped that you might mother us,

 Pull us like teeth, yank soul from body,

 Spirit raw from bloody dreaming flesh

 Across the void to land us safe in dust

 To run in childish tides among blue hills!

 Such thrills were common and from such common stuff

 We made up armies of romancers who, full-grown,

 Built metal thus to underpin the dreams

 And so as astronauts strode forth on fire

 And found a moon much less than halfway up to you.

 For now, inadequate, ‘twill do, oh, yes, ‘twill do.

 While we save up our spit to make another try

 On some day soon this side of century’s end,

 Put landfall down and self-destruct the dream

 That caused us to commence.

 Some few days hence we will set out, the boys-grown-men

 And shuttle us forever back and forth again

 Between your far red beacon light

 And green and blue and white and mortal Earth.

 Our mirth will answer all,

 Our laughter in the face of, Nothing’s smile

 Will ring across the abyss mile on light-year mile.

 Old Mars, then be a hearth to us some little space

 Before we leave your nest to start again a race

 That we must win completely or be lost,

 And, winning, gain Forever, so not count the cost.

 Three billion lights extinguished if one light but stays?

 One last light, yes, to touch the fuse and detonate

 Three billion unborn men to life, to fire forth

 Three billion years of everlasting joys and endless days.

 Old Mars, can you help out with this?

 Why, can boys piss?

 And write their destinies across the skies?

 Their names in sand as well as stars?

 Oh, yes!

 …and cross the t’s.

 …and dot the i’s.

 THE THING THAT GOES BY NIGHT:

 THE SELF THAT LAZES SUN

 Night shades a side of me

 Which leans unto the North

 And calls upon a polar wind to hair my spine

 And fills my lungs with dread

 That part of me, half-dead,

 A left-hand sort of thing gone claw

 Is creep and crawler on my bed;

 By night I feel my spider hand cup blood

 And move of its own itching pride

 To throttle up my soul.

 Then I have need of sun and my warmed Southern self,

 My right hand called from noon

 To wrestle with the dark,

 To tromp the spidered clutch,

 Let loose my soul in brighter gasps of climes

 More yellow and more perfect

 Than a Savior’s exhalations.

 So noon and midnight’s self cell up in one wild flesh

 And own me, each in its own time,

 Or turnabout and own me in an instant fused

 Where black and white twins mix to make a perfect paint

 To color out my mask and make a curious sight

 Within a mirror’s gaze prolong themselves

 Half nights, half days.

 What man is that? I ask,

 Which singer of what song?

 And image answers back:

 The Thing That Goes By Night:

 The Self That Lazes Sun.

 Both answers wrong.

 GROON

 What is the Groon?

 My young dog said.

 What is the Groon;

 Is it live, is it dead?

 Did it fall from the Moon,

 Has it arms, legs, or head?

 Does it walk,

 Or shamble and amble or stalk?

 Does it grumble or mumble or whisper like snow?

 Is it dust, is it fluff?

 Is it snuff

 For a ghost that will sneeze itself inside-out,

 Then, outside-in, turnabout!?

 Can it walk on the wall?

 Will it rise, stay, or fall?

 Does it moan, groan, and grieve?

 What tracks does it leave

 When it walks in the dust

 And makes prints by the light,

 By the moldy old light of the Moon?

 What’s the Groon?

 Is it he, she, or it?

 Does it sprawl, crawl, or sit?

 Is it shaped like a craw or a claw or a hoof?

 Does it tread like a toad in the road

 Or mingle on the shingle-high path

 Of our roof?

 There, aloof, does it tap in the night

 And go down out of sight in the rain-funnel spout?

 Is it strange going in,

 But even more strange coming out?

 Has it shadows to spare?

 Is it rare?

 Does it croon for a loved one, oh,

 Much like itself

 Put away on a shelf

 In a grave or a tomb

 Where it shuttles a loom,

 Spins new shapes for itself

 Made of moon-moss and lint,

 Sparked with Indian flint

 Struck from Indian graves

 Where old Indian braves

 Put their bones up on stilts

 Where their mummy-dust silts

 Join the corn-stalks in dance;

 And the wind off the hills

 Chills wild smokes torn from rooves

 And the dust churned from hooves

 Of ghost horses stormed by

 In the middle of night—

 What a sight! what a sight!

 Isthis, then, the Groon?

 &nbap;

 Is it old as the Sphinx?

 Is it dreadful, methinks?

 Is it Dire, is it Awe?

 Does it stick in your craw?

 Is it smoke or mere chaff?

 Do you whimper or laugh

 At this skin of a snake left to blow on the road?

 Is it cool-iced hoptoad or deep midnight frog

 That goesSplash! if you jump?

 Does it… bump… ‘neath your bed

 Near the head or the toe?

 When it’s there,is it there?

 When it’s gone, where’s it go?

 What’s the Croon?

 Tell me soon…

 For the Moon’s growing older,

 And the wind’s growing colder,

 And the Croon? It grows larger and bolder!

 And darker and stranger!

 Mysoul is in danger!

 For there creep its hands

 Twitched from shadowy lands,

 Reaching out now to touch

 And to hold and to… clutch!

 &nsp;

 Quick, sunlight, bring Noon!

 Fight shadows, fight Moon!

 Give me morning, bright sun!

 Then my battle is won.

 For the Groon cannot fight

 What is Sun, what is Light!

 It will wither away

 With the dawn, with the day!

 But… !

 … come back… next midnight

 With its scare… and its fright..

 Once again we will croon:

 What’s the Groon!

 What’s… the… Groon…?

 THAT WOMAN ON THE LAWN

 Sometimes, gone late at night,

 I would awake and hear

 My mother in another year and place

 Out walking on the lawn so late

 It must have been near dawn yet dark it was

 The only light then in the gesture of the stars

 Which wheeled around in motionings so soft

 They took your breath to see; and there upon the grass

 Like ghost with dew-washed feet she was

 A maid again, alone, quite singular, so young.

 I wept to see her there so strange,

 So unrelate to me, so special to herself,

 So untouched by the world, so evanescent, free,

 With something wild come up in cheeks

 And red to lips, and flashing in the eyes;

 It frightened me.

 Why should she wander out without permit,

 Permission saying go or do not go

 From us or any other…?

 Was she, or My God, wasn’t she our mother?

 How dare she walk, a virgin, fresh once more

 Within a night that hid her face,

 How dare displace us in her thoughts and will?!

 And sometimes even still, late nights,

 I think I hear her soft tread on the sill

 And wake to see her cross the lawn

 Gone wild with wishing, dreaming, wanting

 And crouched down there until dawn,

 Washing her hair with wind,

 Paying no mind to the cold,

 Waiting for some bold strange man

 To rise up like the sun

 And strike her beauteous-blind!

 And weeping I call out to her;

 Oh, young girl there,

 Oh, sweet girl in the dawn!

 I do not mind, no, no.

 I do not mind.

 FROM AN ANCIENT LOCOMOTIVE

 PASSING THROUGH LONG AFTER MIDNIGHT

 Far Rockaway…

 It seems a state of mind

 And not a place.

 Is it the Country of the Blind or merely

 One more face lost in a fog upon a stretch of sand

 That, near the sea, squanders itself in rock

 And muffled heartbeats endlessly

 Aform, atumble with the crumbled dregs of foam

 And murmurings of travel where the wandering

 Daft stumbler of the roads gives up and stands,

 His shoulder creaked with weights

 Of toys left over from a time when he ran out with boys

 Who, in the hour, then grossly grew to men,

 Have left him for some other roads to town.

 So he went out through hills to where

 The customs, laws, aims, dreams

 And circumventures ran them down

 To nothingness

 Where fences rusted, rotted and gave way,

 Where open fields barked foxes, sang with sparrows

 Mocked with crows, accepted snowflakes

 In sparse payment for old crimes

 Those summers killed, deep buried now, and best forgot

 And laid with white.

 There, every night, a nightmare rouse and whirl

 Of chaff and seed

 Snuffed up, is sneezed in four directions;

 Thus spent free it flounders, wanders, lingers

 Molders deep across the dry and cereal land.

 No matter, look, but more than looking, hear:

 At starting of the dawn, at spent of dusk,

 Beginning or shutting down the storms of year

 The paper blowing in a dustboll on the empty road

 The seaweed thistling the sand shore shoals

 In murmured rustling code which speaks to naught

 So Nil gives back a throated trickling of sound:

 Far Rockaway.

 That Rockaway which Far, which Rocks, which tumbles down

 The landfall-click-away-along-away

 Like time which dusts to ruin and to brine

 Down destiny’s incline to desert stills,

 To ruined clay

 Like trollies which excursioned off the cliff

 And fell in ticket-punch confettis celebrating dooms

 To plunge, to steep, to drown in deeps, and dream of summer days

 Now in Forever’s Keep…

 As whirlwind dying in your ear lets pollen say

 In soughing whistled whining all awhisper

 Far

 Far

 And far beyond far

 Rock O rock to sleep in deep night crumbling to night,

 To rambled star…

 Far Rockaway…

 PLEASE TO REMEMBER THE FIFTH

 OF NOVEMBER: A BIRTHDAY POEM

 FOR SUSAN MARGUERITE

 Across the green of years

 A croquet ball comes rolling in the tender moss

 To kiss the bright-striped wicket-pole

 A kiss of Time.

 Through hoops, beneath the shade of trees grown old

 When fogs themselves grew tired of their mist

 And so turned gray and fell to mold,

 Through hoops, the summer sun spins like a globe

 Unraveling

 Forever circuiting a game

 Where players change their faces

 Prompt with every thirty years…

 And shadows of the men upon the lawn

 Grow tall at dawn or short again at dusk,

 Or, drenched by rain, erased,

 Are sketched out by a newer light

 As gulls dip down the freshened air with cries

 Like beggars gone asouling Harvest Night.

 Forever rolls the ball, the wooden round,

 Forever waits the wicket to be touched,

 Then, ricocheted, the bright stuff spins aback

 To start the game again around about;

 The toys always the same,

 The players always stunned by miracles of doubt.

 But yet, for all the seeming lateness of the day,

 How rare to find one player who refused to play…

 We linger here in sun with mallet tender in our hands awhile

 And all just finished, in the midst, or new begun; we smile

 Taking or giving the weapon,

 Standing aside,

 A groom of time or tomorrow’s bride,

 Retiring to the convent of eternity

 Or, rawborn, yelling for some fame

 We feel, deserving, waits us on the field in that long game.

 The tide of players gently rolls,

 The ball goes wafted on from each,

 The tide subsides but then to rise again

 And where the Keeper? and what the Score?

 We gaze about, give sums, make calculation

 To our secret selves and thus, while never knowing more

 Move on, our turf prints denting here and there the green

 Until late showers of rain in afternoon

 Urge grass to rise and all the faint-made hollows fill,

 Gone off down hill we turn upon the scene

 To find no trace, no track, no path

 Where we have, endless, been.

 And from the far side of the field we stand and wave

 To others who commence, who breach the day

 Assured that it will never end.

 A lie? A joyous lie;

 To them we cry, we shout,

 “By God now, yes! You’re right!

 There is no night!

 But only dawn and noon

 There is no moon!

 But only sun and day!”

 In silence then we sadden forth bur private smiles and go our way.

 The ball rolls on the whispered grass.

 The wicket waits. The hoops resound like harps.

 And all the ground of nineteen wondrous years is filled with cries:

 “Begin! Begin!”

 For what is always trembled on beginning

 We know now never dies.

 THAT IS OUR EDEN’S SPRING, ONCE PROMISED

 What I to apeman

 And what then he to me?

 I an apeman one day soon will seem to be

 To those who, after us, look back from Mars

 And they, in turn, mere beasts will seem

 To those who reach the stars;

 So apemen all, in cave, in frail tract-house,

 On Moon, Red Planet, or some other place;

 Yet similar dream, same heart, same soul,

 Same blood, same face,

 Rare beastmen moved to save and place their pyres

 From cavern mouth to world to interstellar fires.

 We are the all, the universe, the one,

 As such our fragile destiny is only now begun.

 Our dreams then, are they grand or mad, depraved?

 Do we say yes to Kazantzakis whose wild soul said:

 God cries out to be saved?

 Well then, we go to save Him, that seems sure,

 With flesh and bone not strong, and heart not pure,

 All maze and paradox our blood,

 More lost than found,

 We go to marry stranger flesh on some far burial ground

 Where yet we will survive and, laughing, look on back

 To where we started on a blind and frightful track

 But made it through, and for no reason

 Save it must be made, to rest us under trees

 On planets in such galaxies as toss and lean

 A most peculiar shade,

 And sleep awhile, for some few million years,

 To rise again, fresh washed in vernal rain

 That is our Eden’s spring once promised,

 Now repromised, to bring Lazarus

 And our abiding legions forth,

 Stoke new lamps with ancient funeral loam

 To light cold abyss hearths for astronauts to hie them home

 On highways vast and long and broad,

 Thus saving what? Who’ll say salvation’s sum?

 Why, thee and me, and they and them, and us and we…

 And God.

 THE FATHERS AND SONS BANQUET

 Strange grief, grand joy, remember? Once a foolish year

 We gathered in some old gymnasium

 That smelled of sweaty seas that dried to dust;

 There sexual exercisers, going gray,

 Came them to table

 With their sons, not yet, yet hopeful, after lust,

 And sat in twins along the white and silver way

 To eat back chicken and sad peas

 And drifts of long-departed winter snows,

 Those sweltered and destroyed-by-summer-night ice creams.

 Then strangely for one moment in it all,

 Someone said something that wasright.

 And each sat tall up in his flesh and knew his bones

 And none knew whether he was boy or man,

 Son or father of the son;

 When all was Team,

 Found twin.

 Suddenly bemused, befuddled and befogged by tears,

 By love surprised, expressed,

 Only to be lost a second later

 When, hands unclasped, shoulders unhugged,

 Clean ears unkissed, brows uncaressed, all bent them once again

 To the untouchable flavors of swiftly melting time.

 The scheme that was divined into the light

 Sinks now again in yarns of numb spaghetti

 Never to be unknit by rhetoric.

 So, unspun, the dream retreats

 To its dumb and brute-bone hiding place

 As tears salt-dry the cheeks, start back in stunned

 And blinded eyes

 And leave no trace.

 Remembering all this last night,

 I saw my father stride within a memory film

 Which ran the length of me

 But measuredhim!

 Behir-d my flesh in amiable disguise

 I found him lurked in my not-knowing

 But now seeing and appraising eyes.

 He long has slept away to moss.

 All the more reason then for my sad searching

 And my sense of loss.

 For he is hardly here in nose or jaw or ear.

 But, ah, look! There! atumble in the hair on wrist and arm

 Like glints of gold and amber and bright sun,

 There everything I was and am and will be soon

 Deep run.

 O, sometimes twice a day I catch him treading by!

 Or, if alert with only simmers of half-vision

 On the flexed wide sill of patient eye,

 Some dozen times or more, especially at noon,

 I capture him in fry and burn and brazen heat;

 He lifts my hands to catch a phantom ball,

 He runs my feet to hurdles that fell down

 And ruins stayed some forty years ago.

 I plan to catch him so, in shocks, abrupt entrapments,

 Rare delights,

 A hundred thousand times or more before I die.

 My dad, old pa, that loving father there

 Awrestle in bright sweat,

 All nestled in the clockspring copper twine

 That furs me with a sunset fire

 And speaks with light and tells more with a silence

 Than my lost sad soul can half divine.

 He rambles where the ants of childhood scurried on my knuckles,

 Now lost, now found, he waves for me to see him

 On that most strange hearth, my wheat-field arm,

 My whorled palm and fingertip, my harvest flesh.

 Dear God, praise Him, that He connives,

 That He burns wide my gaze withboth these lives:

 To see the father in the son all snug

 And tucked and warm and happy-fine inside.

 Miraculous! that pore and blood

 And cell and gene and chromosome

 Are that odd immortality we rarely note or speak of

 For a home.

 Yet home it is, and threshold of the fire

 Where father, playing at a death

 Did sink, retire, and stoke him up a warmer blaze:

 Myself… a bon rekindled with genetic praise.

 His fingers hover as I hover out my grasp,

 My breath of exultation, thanking Providence,

 Sighs out a prayer with every gasp.

 Thankful for me, I give my thanks to him,

 In twin thanksgivings then we share our single heart with grace,

 And love this soul, this flesh, these limbs,

 Our basking place.

 We are the stuff of each other’s dreams;

 He the long since melted and vanished

 And I all that remains of those dimly remembered

 Warm June summer night ice creams…

 And now at last

 From the long lazing drowsy fathers and sons banquet of life

 We wander home

 Two on the same sidewalk

 Ambling as one.

 And still tonight, tonight,

 Alone and shaving, the rippled mirror bright,

 My own gaze seeks beyond this lather-mask and foam;

 Old One, I miss but find you here,

 This is your home

 And yours my marrow

 And I your son.

 Never were there two of us but only one.

 Once the one was you.

 But with the changings of the sea

 The tide, gone out, returns,

 And now, now, now, O, now…

 … that one is me.

 TOUCH YOUR SOLITUDE TO MINE

 Sweetest love, come now to meet me,

 Touch your solitude to mine;

 Take, enfold, protect and greet me,

 Save me from my world with thine.

 Give me more than I might borrow,

 Much of joy, yet some of sorrow;

 Search and find in Love’s high attics

 Horizontal mathematics,

 Toys to prove the simple sums

 That honeys, nectars, pollens, gums

 Of Love’s taking, giving, grieving,

 Sweetly seeding and conceiving

 Will thrive our days to myth and lore:

 Two separate minds, one flesh the score.

 Deftly sing it, lady, praise

 How I lose me in your maze,

 Gladly lost there, never found,

 In your honeyed underground.

 People asking then for me,

 Tell them where I buried be.

 Tangled in your private wild,

 Say that you grow large with child,

 So one day from secret earth

 Middle age will find rebirth.

 I not to tomb, but hence to womb

 Where your maidenhair then growing

 Clothes this ancient peach afresh,

 Robes it round with April flesh.

 O, men by thousands, such as I

 Would gladly ‘neath your sweet grass lie

 To claim what’s tucked beneath your lawn

 Will rise as fresh and young as dawn.

 Love’s Time Machine will shelve me there

 And chaff the old to new and fair

 And, nurtured, kept, by nectars mild Be born again as your last child.

 GOD IS A CHILD;

 PUT TOYS IN THE TOMB

 God is a Child;

 Put toys in the tomb

 And He will come play.

 What’s new in this?

 Why, not a thing at all.

 It was known and tried

 So many years upon a year ago,

 When kings knew swift-lost sons

 Who went to dust in summers

 That turned wintry chill

 Within a night.

 All humble-proud, those captain kings departed

 To the tomb

 And there by still sarcophagi of amiable sons gone cold

 And rambled off across the abyss rim

 Astroll upon the meadows of parched space,

 The weeping monarchs set down toys

 That only yestermorn were in the hands of child.

 These fragments of lost play,

 Strewn all about like breadcrumbs for some mighty bird

 To come and pluck and eat,

 Were thus left there

 In hopes that God or gods, a singular or plural Presence

 Might, paused curious, see,

 And step in across the mortal sill

 To spend a while each night in splendid joyful wakes

 By sleeping son;

 To nudge his stuffs, to wake his soul perhaps;

 So boy and God might squat awhile

 On tombstone floor and rattle numbered bones

 Or tremble ghostly xylophones and shiver harps

 Or trace in dust a hopscotch pentagram

 And dive in it

 To swim on river tides of moon

 Let down through windows of the vault.

 Could God refuse such sport?

 No, no. Our God, Forever’s Child,

 Will always play and show rambunctious wills

 Among the molecules and atom storms

 As well as knockabout of toys within a silent dungeon keep.

 Let the world sleep.

 Let father sit outside the door

 And only now and then peek in at toys

 Placed there about the box where his son hides;

 And if he hears twin laughters,

 One seedling-sparrow small,

 The other vast as weathers off the sea,

 Let him not look at all

 But weep, and turn his tears to joys

 That there, hid down, asprawl in floury gusts of midnight tomb,

 There be a frolic of brothers/fathers/sons…

 Oh listen! Let the sound fill up your heart!

 That tumult of the large

 And oh so pitifully weak small happy boys.

 ODE TO ELECTRIC BEN

 Ben Franklin was that rarity:

 A man whose jolly-grim polarities did tempt our God

 To hurl his bolts which, fastened to Ben’s ears,

 Lit up his cerebrum for years

 And thus illuminated reams of history.

 His dreams, electric dreams,

 Were knocked together out of Boy Mechanic schemes;

 He wet his finger, held it to God’s Mystery and Storm.

 God, in turnabout, gesticulated, touched

 To know Ben’s warm or cooling weather.

 So somehow these unconvivial two

 Fell in together and were friends.

 Their means quite different

 But most similar-same their ends:

 To Light the Universe,

 Or light a world,

 Large thing or small.

 God blinked and Lo! the Nebulae!

 Ben blinked; electric founts poured from his hands;

 Within a century his sparks had lit the lands

 And filled the towns with noon at night.

 Such was God’s vision.

 Such was Ben’s sight.

 And after long years, some eighty-odd or more

 Of intemperate days, good afternoons, storms, calms,

 Bad fights, then making peace,

 Vast multiples of weather,

 God yawned, Ben gummed his eyes,

 But still arguing… went off to bed together

 SOME LIVE LIKE LAZARUS

 Some live like Lazarus

 In a tomb of life and come forth curious late

 To twilight hospital and mortuary room.

 From one womb to another

 Is but a falling step;

 Yet Innocence unbandaged

 Blinks at Truth in terror

 And would blind itself again!

 But better the lame drags forth at last

 From morning sickness waxed to twilight sleeps

 Thine own self litter forth in autumn’s self-consume

 Than linger in one room.

 Let summer wander idiot in these eyes

 Which stricken wide one wild sweet moment upon day

 Fix, transfix, and die,

 Than, warned by widows, stifled in a cage

 All stillborn stay.

 From first cry to last breath

 If all one knows is death upon a frost-rimed path

 To yet more ice,

 Let one warm breath suffice

 For July dawns of hail

 And August snows when stormbound senses fail.

 Best Lazarus born of witch-hag, shocked, miscarrying

 Than, senses shorn, gone ill with thought

 Of marrying ear to music,

 Eye to luscious color,

 Nose to time and tide’s caprice,

 Hand to squalor.

 Tongue to late sour wine must answer sweet.

 Mere roadway dust-track now name street.

 Best Lazarus born a dwarf dismembered

 Than cat-sick hairball choked in half-out,

 Hid moth-hair, chaff-seed, cold steam of un-lust

 Unthrust, by hungry Death himself quite ill-remembered,

 Never birthed at all.

 Better cold skies seen bitter to the North

 Than blind unseeing sac-bile gone to ghost.

 If Rio is lost, love the Antarctic Coast.

 O ancient Lazarus!!

 Come ye forth.

 THESE UNSPARKED FLINTS,

 THESE UNCUT GRAVESTONE BRIDES

 The ladies in the libraries

 Do not go home at night;

 Stand watch, be sure, just wait

 Outside the mellow place at nine

 Crouched down in bush and elderberry vine,

 Look in through windows tall

 Where virgin brides go quiet as the dust

 By shelves where titles ranked, gold-bright as foxes’ eyes,

 Glint sparks of lust.

 Among the million dead and million more to perish

 These unsparked flints, these uncut gravestone brides

 Do nourish silence, and their tread

 Is stuff of moss and downfell rust.

 They do not touch the floor, incircling the dark,

 To one-by-one pull strings to snatch the light,

 Extinguish and move on to next and snatch again,

 Keys at their waists ajingle in a gentle rain,

 Like skaters in a summer dream,

 Their spectacles agleam beneath the greenglass shades.

 The smell of hyacinth pervades where they have been

 And goes before as harbinger of youngness kept

 Clasp-corseted in Iron Maiden flesh.

 Where air was warm and bounteous on the sill,

 In passing, such as these give vapors and the chill

 To airs that touch and move aside.

 They hide themselves a moment in the stacks

 To shove long needles murderous in their hair

 And find themselves in mirrors, unaware;

 Both seer and seen the Queen of Iceland’s crop,

 A blind stare, a strange drift of unshaped snow.

 Then, at the door they go, give last looks round the shop

 Where Time is vended in the books,

 Where skin prolapses from the dinosaur,

 Then wheel again to knife the air, go out and down the street

 To places no one knows.

 They do not go.

 Their coats all buttoned tight,

 Their spectacles fresh-washed, they spin to call:

 “Is anybody there?”

 In hopes that some deep terrifying voice of man

 Might some night soon reply, “Ah, yes.”

 Their ringless fingers tremble on their dress.

 They hold their breath, their souls, they wait.

 Then reach up for the last light-string and yank.

 The night drops down.

 But in the instant of eclipse

 They snap-close-clench themselves like

 Ancient paper flowers of Japan.

 A wind from basements dank and attics desert-dry

 Breathes up, breathes down the air,

 These scentless flowers shower everywhere!

 And where before the brittle women stood,

 Some vagrant tattered crepes now tap the floor.

 As for the rest, the lustful books on shelves gape wide

 And into these the funeral-flower souls now rattle,

 Tickle, rustle, hide, and, hiding, rest;

 Each to its age, each to its own and proper nest.

 This maid to Greece and Rape of the Sabines,

 That one to Child’s Crusade

 Where knights shuck off their stuffs

 To bed the sixteenth summer maid;

 The third and last cold statue turned to farewell summer’s dust

 Flies up the Transylvania height

 And welcomes lust by showing it her neck

 And trading randy bite for bite.

 All, all turned to bookmarks!

 Slipped in dreadful books

 Where loving makes a din

 Ten times as loud as loving in the world beyond the shelves.

 Tucked in warm dark the bookmark maidens

 Feel themselves crushed and beauteously mangled,

 Scream and gibber all the night,

 Only swooning down to dreaming sleep at dawn,

 Smiles creped about their mouths.

 Squashed flat ‘twixt Robin and his nimble nibbling men,

 And Arthur who, if thanked,

 Will pull Excalibur from them at breakfast-time,

 And so be King, his weapon free of stone

 That held it fast, all hungry for a fight.

 Such screams! Such gladsome mourns of happiness!

 List, listen! by the library.

 But, soft… the books, gummed shut, do muffle it.

 The maids all night each night are maids no more.

 Come back at noon.

 And see the ancient cronies three, aswoon,

 All somewhat tipsy-drunk and tenterhooked with memory

 Propped up at desks as if the sun were still the moon.

 Give nod,

 Give book,

 Go off, but never ask, for you will never know

 Where, where o where at night

 These long lost cold-chipped marble ladies go.

 Ask silence,

 Linger on awhile

 But all you’ll have for answer

 Is a sad remembrance smile

 They’ll quickly cover with a Kleenex, wipe away.

 So, old again and lonely and unsquashed

 And ringless, pale, and breathing only ice,

 They face the heatless noon,

 The sunless hours of day,

 Reckon your question,

 Recommend files,

 And give virginal advice.

 AND THIS DID DANTE DO

 The truth is this:

 That long ago in times

 Before the birth of Light,

 Old Dante Alighieri prowled this way

 On continent unknown to mad Columbus;

 Made landfall here by sneaking, sly Machine,

 Invention of his candle-flickered soul

 Which, wafted upon storms,

 Brought him in harmful mission down.

 So, landed upon wilderness of dust

 Where buffaloes stamped forth

 A panic of immense heartbeat,

 Dante scanned round and stamped his foot,

 And hoofed the trembling flints l

 And named a Ring of Hell.

 With parchment clenched in tremorous fist,

 He inked out battlements of grime

 And arcs of grinding coggeries which, struck,

 Snowed down a dreadful cereal of rust

 Long years before such iron soots were dreamt

 Or made, or flown,

 Long long before such avenues of steel in sky were sought.

 So, in a guise like Piranesi lost amidst-among

 His terrible proud Prisons,

 The Poet sketched a vaster, higher, darker Pent-up Place

 A living demon-clouded sulphur-spread of Deep.

 From tenement to tenement of clapboard dinge

 He rinsed a sky with coal-sack burning,

 Hung clouds with charcoal flags

 Of nightgowns flapping like strange bats

 Shocked down from melancholy steam-purged locomotive caves.

 Then through it all put scream of metal flesh,

 Great dinosaur machines charged forth by night,

 All stomaching of insucked souls Pent up in windowed cells.

 Delivered into concrete river-shallow streets,

 Men fled themselves from spindrift shade

 Of blown black chimney sifts and blinds of smoking ghosts.

 And on the brows of all pale citizens therein

 Stamped looks of purest terror,

 Club-foot panic and despair,

 A rank, a raveling dismay that spread in floods

 To drain off in a lake long since gone sour

 With discharged outpouring of slime.

 So drawn, so put to parchment, so laid down

 In raw detail, this Ring of Hell (No mind what Number!)

 Was Dante’s greatest Inventory counting-up

 Of Souls in dread Purgation.

 He stood a moment longer in the dust.

 He let the frightened drumpound heart of buffalo tread

 Please to excite his blood.

 Then, desecration-proud, happy at the great Black Toy

 He’d printed, builded, wound, and set to run

 In fouled self-circlings,

 Old Dante hoisted up his heels,

 Left low the continental lake shore cloven, stamped,

 And hied him home to Florence and his bed,

 And laid him down still dreaming with a smile,

 And in his sleep spoke centuries before its birth

 The Name of this Abyss, the Pit, the Ring of Hell

 He had machinery-made:

 CHICAGO!

 Then slept,

 And forgot his child.

 YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN

 They say you cannot, no, in any way

 Go home again.

 Yet home I came,

 And picked an hour when the train

 Slid in upon the golden track of twilight to the town.

 I rode in bronze and saw the panoply of ore

 Laid out on every leaf and every roofing cope

 And balustrade;

 The train rode high on trestle as it braked on toward its stop

 And I gazed out upon that special dusking sea

 Which washes for scant minutes on the world

 At rise and set of sun.

 Stepped down, I moved upon the yellow planks

 Torn up from all the halls of ancient myths. The station sign was gold.

 The trees, my god, the trees wore epaulettes!

 The ivy on the old school wall was dazzling braid.

 And in the shade the eye of cat sent forth

 A minted signaling which could be spent!

 The walks I trod were saffron from an Indian sand;

 The lawns were amber carpetings

 Where warrior ants climbed stricken with such luscious tints

 As made them seem the richest armory in time.

 Mere bees upon the air were tapestries.

 And down the slanted beams of now-lost afternoon

 And soon-come night

 A spider made his way

 On harps of honey-colored twine

 Which struck might cry with pure delight.

 All, all was light!

 The very air swam syrupy with tunes of wind

 And rattlings of coins which tufted every branch.

 The leaves beneath each tree were jackpot avalanche.

 A dog trot-rambled by

 His fur made up of stuffs from out Fort Knox,

 His eyes cuff-links he sported without pride,

 Accepted, knew, forgot, and took in stride.

 The house where I was born,

 My grandma’s house,

 Most terrible, most beautiful of all!

 As I came by

 Aflame it was, all fire in the windows

 From the plunging sun;

 Each glass a meld of brazen metals

 From old shields on which a thousand dead

 Were proudly borne toward sunset cairns.

 As if raised high upon the instant of my coming

 The windows dazzled, clamoring the lawns,

 Then rushed to set more torches

 On the blazing rose-filled porches,

 And attics danced with firefly dust

 As cupolas took light like lust

 And virgin chandeliers were crazed

 And cracked with flame.

 I stood amazed,

 I trod the flaxen grass;

 Let smoldering towers blind my gaze.

 Never such welcome!

 In all my days of going forth and coming back,

 Never such wealth.

 The sunset knew my lack

 And sparked a million bons to show the way,

 All celebrant, a burning down of happiness

 Before my river-running, gladsome-fractured eyes.

 All of its banks it opened,

 All of its wealth it spent

 In one last great pervading spree.

 I sensed but one cool shade of Death behind a single tree

 Waiting for the silent river of light to ebb

 So it might seize not only cash but me.

 But now it was an hour all sweetly met;

 I did come home and chose by clumsy miracle

 A time which made the world stand still

 Mute-struck to bronze.

 A statue, then, I fed myself the splendid prides of air

 And heard the birds that sang with jeweled throats:

 You’ll live forever. This, your summer, gone eternal,

 Will stay fair.

 I stayed.

 The sun went out.

 The sky shut down its light.

 Gone wise, a few days later, rising up near dawn

 I made my way through streets of night

 To train and left the way I came—

 As sun fired gold to mint the town;

 Still the same king I was upon arriving

 All royal gowned I left in a lie of light.

 The last I saw of it

 The town was, avenue and shop, bright swathed

 In goldleaf touching and renewed.

 A tree all dripped with Spanish royal doubloons

 Shook with premonitions as I passed

 And mouthed farewells.

 In Chicago

 Some hours later,

 The railway station men’s room

 Smelled like the lion house

 At the zoo

 In Dublin.

 When I was very old.

 AND DARK OUR CELEBRATION WAS

 And dark our celebration was,

 For Death was sweet to us;

 By that I mean it filled our sacks so full

 We leaned atilt round moonlit corners of the town

 And sprinted on to doorways where we buzzed and rang

 And lit the pumpkin windows and held forth our hands

 To take the treasures of the time,

 Then ran again, my lovely thistle girls and I

 Gone old within a night yet young with them.

 How grand such Eves, how good such girls

 That they slowed pace for ancient boys like me.

 Who could not give it up, stay home, put by that holiday.

 I had to go, to lurch, to tap, to laugh, to walk at last

 All happy-tired home in cold wind blowing

 With the full-lit moon to wife and hearth and aunts

 Come by to wait for us: the crazy man and his wild pride

 Of maiden beasts.

 Long years ahead, dear girls, on nights like those,

 Do please drop by at dusk, come sit upon my stone

 And speak glad words

 To spirit gone but wishing to be still

 With you when you go forth with your own children

 Thus to filch and prize and laugh at every door.

 No more. I stay.

 But save for me a single sweet, some Milky Way to munch

 Or bring a pumpkin cut and lit and place it so to warm my feet.

 Then on the path run, go! knowing that I’m not dead,

 For you are my head, my heart, my limbs, my blood set free;

 You are the me that is warm,

 I am the me that is cold,

 You are the me that is young,

 I old.

 But what of that?!

 Death’s mean at all his Tricks, God, yes,

 But you the Treats

 Who run to beg my life and yours

 In all the Future’s wild, delirious, dark

 But warm and living streets.

 MRS. HARRIET MADDEN ATWOOD,

 WHO PLAYED THE PIANO FOR THOMAS A. EDISON

 FOR THE WORLD’S FIRST PHONOGRAPH RECORD,

 IS DEAD AT 105

 And did you know that still she was alive?

 Somewhere, old Harriet Madden Atwood, there’s a name!

 And freshly gone now at, listen to the sum:

 One hundred years plus five!

 Why, gods in multiples, there’s no one else alive

 Recalls what she recalled just some few days ago

 When in her bed, remembering, she tuned pianos past

 our ken;

 She outlived twenty-on-a-thousand better men

 And women who shored up their bones

 And lived out lives on borrowed blood

 And loans of vital stuffs,

 While kindling up her dreams with echoings of song

 That needle-hissed her mind all midnight long.

 She played for Edison!

 Old Thomas asked her talent to begin.

 So she began and in beginning knew no end.

 George Atwood came to find her at Old But Then Young Edison’s request.

 Timidly she came, all doubt, and saw the strange machine

 In which he would entrap, wind up her trembled soul,

 There nest her sound like fragile mail To be delivered in some unfrequented year

 She would frequent by song and song alone,

 Her body gone, her touch would linger on the sill

 And fill the year Two Thousand Ninety-Nine with chords.

 Her late rewards?

 A tumult of applause broadcast down shoals of stars

 And Space

 From all the future places where the race

 Has gone, will go, to hide and seek,

 The billions of them nameless as they go.

 But, strange—

 The name of Harriet Hadden Atwood they will know.

 For Edison she played.

 This maid another year did sit her down

 In some small glade of time

 And place her fingers to the keys

 From which sprang old but now-made-new within-the-instant

 Melodies.

 Her claims were modest, Nor did she take a fee

 She removed her gloves and gently kicked the pedals

 A trimly perfect mediocrity—

 Which means not bad nor yet a hair beyond

 The median good;

 She was a known commodity in the tuneless humming of bees

 That was her green-fern, sharp-thorned summer rose

 And cut-grass neighborhood.

 All children, with their butterflies like Fates

 Caught up in nets, nodded as she passed,

 Their fingers aching at remembrance of strict lessons

 That she taught;

 She baked and bought the simples of her Time.

 When in between a lesson or recital

 Less than humble are her vital statistics,

 Less than a complication the logistics of supply and demand

 In her life.

 Tom Edison needed a sweet-sour pound of high green summer apples;

 George Atwood looked and found: a pianist, then a wife.

 Both were gladdened by her sound.

 Now that sound will gladden out the hearts of girls unborn

 Beyond Poughkeepsie, Saturn, Jupiter,

 Far Rockaway, Moon, Mars, or Matterhorn.

 In nebulae at present kept beyond our gaze

 Harriet Madden Atwood, who played for the now-long-dead

 In other days,

 Will, in future ages,

 Doubtless in Alpha Centauri,

 Be counted as one of their new and unpredictable culture rages.

 Unknown in her own time,

 No titan talent she.

 Yet since she was the start of some new thing,

 One billion years from tonight

 She will bloom in eternal spring.

 Five light-years away and away,

 Miss Maiden-Lady Madden, later found-and-married Atwood,

 Will play and play and play.

 Tom Edison asks it!

 In seance he sets her task ever on:

 More, yes! once more, yes, now, more!

 Five presidents heard and sent notes

 On her birthdays recalling some raggedy tunes

 They’d last heard on some late summer night

 Now-gone-forever excursion boats.

 Such threadbare keys,

 By a passaging of time beyond the lees of every planet

 In our basement system of the Void

 May well outlive the off-beat hummings of a Freud,

 Linger with Beethoven,

 Stay with Berlioz.

 Made up of humble clay, ?

 Harriet Hadden Atwood, a girl whose only Cause

 Was to play

 Piano

 Trapped by Thomas Alva E.,

 Now lives Forever!

 Give or take a day.

 WHAT SEEMS A BALM

 IS SALT TO ANCIENT WOUNDS

 All things are mixed.

 The very flesh of God

 Is compound eye which looks upon a world

 And cracks the light,

 And fixes star at very blackest heart of night,

 And shades the noon with ghost

 And leans the shadow tree

 Across the flowered lawn,

 And fringes, all serene,

 The sea with teeth of carnivore

 Which boil in hungry schools beneath the calms;

 What seems a balm is salt to ancient wounds;

 What seems a death, gone teeming unto worms,

 From splendid garbage rouses up new forms;

 Beneath the mask of Peace

 Old War hones swords and builds

 A battlement of scrimshaw bone;

 Beneath the battered shield

 Soft flesh, gone simple with a summer’s day,

 But waits for asking and then, asked, gives yield.

 So round-about all goes, now hard, now soft,

 Now mild, now mad, the sheep and wolf arun in tandem flocks:

 Lost man, found world,

 Fused paradox.

 HERE ALL BEAUTIFULLY COLLIDES

 The sky is inked with blue

 The grass, sketched, scribbled, drawn, is green ink, too,

 And all about ravines take children to their Deeps;

 While from the east at dawn and west at sunset seeps

 A color of life’s blood

 Where clouds amass

 And spread the tincture.

 At the airport, dragon-shadows pass

 Kites shuttle

 Shadow down

 Becoming planes

 Which

 Oh

 So

 Softly Land On…

 …grass.

 On rooftops roosters cut from metal

 Whine with wind and nose gone-far directions

 Where only children with their secret

 Gum-chewed mint impacted wisdom go.

 The eaves glide-whisper soft of summer nights

 Now letting flow

 The silk discumberments of dreams:

 Remembered snow.

 Rivers run here not filled with summer dust

 Or sun-crazed rock and idiot stone

 But actual water.

 At noon the streets are church-nave deep in cool green shade

 Across the lawns: battalions of glare,

 Sun-dandelions

 Clock-light the drifting grin and footpad ease of dog,

 The vacuum-cleaner exhaled dust-fluff cat,

 The rubber tread of never-silent boy.

 Here all beautifully collides

 Unfrictioned;

 Summer heals all with an oiled and motioned fcase.

 Here no disease.

 Here health of world in distilled proportion,

 Here gyroscope ahum kept spun by bees

 Who drowse-drown lusciously entrapped by flowers

 Or hummingbirds which fatten forth the hours with pure dripped sound…

 In libraries where dry flowers drop

 From books of printed flowers

 Old clocks run dry of time keep rigid frozen pointed

 At never known, so never remembered, so never forgotten, hours.

 The librarian has been there forever.

 She was never young; But will seem younger as we grow years.

 The stamping of the purple inkstamped data in the books

 Is like the tread of wisdom in this place;

 The lily-pages blow and whisper

 Boys go lost and murmuring in the stacks

 Where all is mystery of green-mossed well

 Where ignorance shouts to hear a learning echo.

 These be the granite cliffs and quarries where we swim

 In cooling words on summer midnights

 And come forth printed o’er with poems

 Which toweled from our flesh yet drip from fingertips

 And stifle up the eyes with most sad joys.

 All, all town, home, shop, Elite Theatre, library: first class.

 A first class summer in a first class town.

 Where green ink skies make green rains fall, enfilter down.

 While at the airport,

 Oh, God, look!

 How Soft,

 How sweet and rolling,

 See! They pass! All dragon-shadow!

 The kited planes

 Strings cut,

 Laze….

 … drifting…

 Down…

 To land…

 On

 Grass.

 GOD FOR A CHIMNEY SWEEP

 What’s rough is this:

 That life, which was a building up of bricks

 From which one piped one’s exultations,

 Now crusts itself within,

 The nested stuff keeps soot,

 So every cell upon a cell is darkened

 With accumulant small dooms,

 Some deft disasters of those lesser morns

 Which were forgot by noon

 But now in numbers rank themselves

 And by their very armies overwhelm.

 The spirit suffers at the count,

 The soul is smothered by their waves.

 One’s laughter is stopped up and jugged

 Within the boneyard cage of rib;

 One wants to shout these damned molecules away,

 With single rear-backed roars and declamation

 Give jolt and pound and hammering of chimney bricks

 So all the soot falls down, an evil snow,

 And life and flesh and soul gust up,

 Are cleansed to joy themselves again

 And morns are sweet when one wakes up

 And feels a boy stir over, hid within

 And turned all smiling to hear cries

 Of other boys, all juiced with sun and desperate betew

 Tossing soft light pebble laughter up to rap

 The ice-clear window panes

 Till life runs out to meet

 Before the body joins

 The soul on summer paths to drowning wilderness.

 O, God, give strength to those like me

 Who in their middle years so dearly wish

 To pay with laughs the lurking Dustman

 That most strange Chimney Sweep,

 So he might knock this hearthing place

 This frame of brittling skeleton

 And wash all back to rinsed pink brick again,

 Restart the fires

 And dampen not their ardor

 Yet a while.

 I would stand baked in my own blood

 Warm hands with self’s hid fiery surprise,

 A fire in each cell and all cells swarmed

 With the vast true sun’s uprise.

 But how knock soot, clean dirt away

 Which blinds the soul to its own lineaments,

 Which tamps the ears so one can miss

 The rare teakettle simmer of warm breath

 From out one’s grateful mouth?

 For Christmas then, O God, kick me a holy kick

 Of great outcharged delight.

 Gone midnight with too many dusks

 And dawns of knowledge,

 Knock me white,

 O God, yes do!

 Strike me with laughter’s downflashed lightning;

 Make me Light!

 TO PROVE THAT COWARDS DO SPEAK BEST

 AND TRUE AND WELL

 O, tell me not, dear Will,

 That cowards die a thousand deaths;

 I know, I know!

 Why every breath I take does crack my bones,

 Tear my flesh asunder,

 Undermine my mask with moans and sighs.

 And yet, while full of death and lies,

 More full of pomegranate life and truth this coward be;

 I am reborn, O Jesus’ nailed and frightened breath, why, hourly.

 And with such mirth!

 Why, listen,

 Even though my shocked eyes burn and glisten

 With tears torn free by griefs and mad surprise,

 What cries of joy, also!

 At the crazed and awful triumph up from Death,

 Again and again and again I cull in breath

 With equal seizures of fright,

 Shout back the night, call in the morn,

 Thus being reborn and, O much thanks! reborn.

 And all of ye brave

 Who die but once?

 Get you to the grave.

 For you dumb remain, and go all mute to mounds and worms.

 My terms for life are better,

 For while brother to night and dying each hour,

 I, seeded with terror and handsome dread,

 Am rebirthed as funeral flower

 Which speaks again and, with panics of heart’s lost blood, again.

 Your panoply of Will is steel which keeps out pain and thought,

 From which you cannot speak.

 My life is dearly bought;

 I strike from shadows some few flints of light

 While strickened is my heart

 And flesh so thin to wounds it bleeds me white.

 Yours is the bravery of fools

 That will not last the night;

 Death and the tomb your wit, your law,

 Your first and final Rite.

 Ride high in pomp, strut, drum, and flutter flags,

 And go to Doom all bound up brave.

 Your destiny is dumb.

 Long after dark, my tongue will writhe

 Like sunset snake within my grave

 To prove that cowards do speak best and true and well.

 And trumpeters and drummers of bravado,they…?

 Go to Hell.

 Go to Hell.

 I, TOM, AND MY ELECTRIC GRAN

 At night she came within my room

 All breathing out of weather kept from Time…

 A summer here, a summer there,

 Spent days, warm haze and blue delights,

 Remnants of some spun-toy winter nights,

 A sound of sleds that rocked the sleep of worlds.

 A tinsel cry of icicle on upper tower keep

 A sound of wakening

 A sound of sleep,

 All these, transistorized

 Packed in the cells and whorls

 And thumbprints of her hum-spun spirit glass

 Then caused her Ouija hand to move

 And write in quiet motions large my name and Fate

 Upon the loving dark over my bed.

 Yes! Yes! to all I asked she said,

 And firmly No when No was needed.

 This woman warm as breast of slumbering fowl,

 With wisdom seeded,

 Kept safe my years and lanced my most infectious tears

 With careful hand or handkerchief,

 And held me close to smell her secret whispering

 And murmuring machines,

 The armory of electric creatures which

 With echoings of kites on high March days

 Said, “Boy, you’ll live forever. Go in peace…”

 Then went I, running,

 Tom, from my electric Gran.

 And now when grown into a man

 I look me back and see her all aglow in dark,

 Her mind a circuitry,

 Her veins pale tapestries of spark,

 Her hair full panoplied with light

 A dim torch wavering of Liberty by night

 Electric hive of wisdom from which bees……

 Lit forth and stung me to my chores…

 A library, a toyshop vault, a keep of wisdom’s spores;

 Where centuries of freshly dusted gray philosophers

 Wake from sleep

 And speak out of her mouth

 And from her tongue

 Use her for bell and clapper

 And there all clung and hung upon a lightning tower

 They announce the Past, an amiable present,

 And some future hour sung of in banged voices from the bell,

 Here Schopenhauer gives shout,

 There Dante trudges Hell.

 Sweet Gran, electric Grandma of my life

 You keep in minuscule a.c.-d.c. dungeons deep

 The poets of an Age, a deaf-mute Sage perhaps

 Who speaks but from your eyes

 And cavemen also from a time of brute surmise

 All these are shadow-painted on your brow

 And throng your pomegranate soul

 In which I burrowed like the monkey-mole

 Now leapt akimbo, now thrusting sod

 Now nosing Devil and now vaulting God.

 O grandmother of years,

 O, mother of the mineral soils of Earth,

 I see you wandered on the midnight lawn,

 A stillness kept, a waiting to begin.

 A woman? No. A pageantry of wheels?

 Much more.

 A tin soul, trapped and mouthed, which felt the Universe

 And spoke its mysteries at dawn.

 BOYS ARE ALWAYS RUNNING SOMEWHERE:

 A POEM

 Boys are always running somewhere.

 Ask them where, in running, they all go?

 They’ll prance around, dance backward,

 Answer, puzzled:

 They don’t know…

 And with a glance that says you’re sad or mad for asking,

 On they’ll flow.

 They are a river-run of Time;

 Theirs not to ask or answer but to fit

 The rhyme of circumstance and old beginnings without end;

 God sends them forth for His own Reasonings

 To south-east-north or why not west?

 Whichever’s first is best.

 Whichever’s second, well, that’s second-rate,

 But better to be second, moved, in motion

 Than be late for beckonings of Fate and rare fell plights

 That wait beyond horizons, atop hills,

 Fired by dawns,

 Or gone acold in dreadful deep November nights.

 Boys are always running somewhere.

 Not to start is a sin.

 Who’s to say they should not leap from bed,

 Roar from house, chockful of hotcakes, rituals and rites,

 Ever ready to begin?

 Men are always running somewhere.

 Ask them on the train, the jet, the rushing sidewalk, where?

 They’ll shift their suitcase or their gum

 Or their cigar,

 To ponder, wonder, peer, then, shut up, wander off,

 Thinking you even madder and somehow sadder

 Than the boys who thought you mad and sad,

 And thus immunized to joys.

 Twelve years before,

 If boys were all yearning,

 Now, as men, they have been to where they wanted to run,

 Reached the end of the line, had their tickets punched

 And circle back again

 With tossed confetti-stuffs on hatbrim and lapel

 To prove their madcap learning,

 To show wherever it was, was a party!

 And what the hell.

 But, brushing the unknown Mardi Gras from off their eyebrows,

 Hefting their great-coats stuffed with memos,

 Ask them now not where they’re going

 But where’ve theyBeen?

 They’ll cudgel up their brows and scowl

 As if some survey-maker had just been delicately obscene,

 Recheck their datebooks, shuffle

 Maunder,

 But not spell those Destinations Past…

 They’ve Gone! So what’s to tell?

 Going was all the custom.

 Now the custom is: Having Been.

 And you?

 Standing there with your battered kite and no string?

 It’s obvious you’ve never went or gone

 Or made the scene or, trying, failed,

 Or done a thing!

 You go not barefoot,

 Neither are you shod by Mercury, Apollo,

 Or any other plain or fancy god.

 Where were they going?

 Where last seen?

 The man and boy stand tall and small before you;

 One gray, the other green,

 And, damn it! cry:

 They’ve been Far Traveling…

 Boy running to meet the man,

 Man running to meet the boy,

 Collision-course; struck bruised,

 All tender-fused, why, look!

 They make a troop,

 A regiment of two

 Who ramble thus forever in their single, simple,

 Rare rambunctious joy.

 So, suddenly, we see

 Where the one was wandering, what he wanted to be;

 Where the other has been and, having been, will forever know.

 Ask, yes, but answers are absurd.

 Like dogs they’ll stand and cock their heads at you

 And tell no word.

 But looks can say:

 “I ran to be the man.”

 Or, “Once I was a boy in summer, rushing to be me.”

 It is no sin to not know where you’ve come from,

 Or where go. Why should they tell,

 When at their secret hearts they spell

 The finest truths, and, spelling, mow the lawns of summer,

 Barking, snapping, circling, biting, yapping,

 There they vault, sunsets

 There they share dawns.

 There, ambidextrous to delight, they flow.

 And who’s to stop that joy which hides and seeks

 Like child in man?

 And who’s to warn and tell, prevent,

 The man who calls out to the boy?

 Here lie their tandem prints in blowing sands—

 Quick! here they turn back!

 To wipe out their prints with a smile, a shout,

 With quick paws that are hands.

 Boys are always running somewhere.

 Where, where, where O where?

 They know.

 Men are always running running running somewhere.

 O woman, woman of all the sad wise years,

 Let them go.

 O TO BE A BOY IN A BELFRY

 O to be a boy in a belfry

 Tilting summer noon in tumults,

 On your back, the sun squeezed lemon in your eyes,

 The blue heaven all bright fries,

 Your feet raw naked to the light,

 Strewn warm in bed of straw high up in tower

 And this your hour to summon all to prayer.

 An incense burns the wind,

 The altars wait to tremble,

 The ancient dust to tingle

 As you kick heel and toe,

 Strive up, fists under rump

 To patter-slap, to shape, to drive the bell

 And start its voice athunder

 In your bones and swarming through the air

 To shake blue snows of summer sky

 Invisible and drifting on the glare.

 The bell swings traveling; you kick it on;

 Returned, you thrust it, hungry-mouthed and lolling

 Forth again, now lashing iron tongue

 To lick its clangorous rims,

 To bang, to detonate in glorious pronunciamentos:

 I’m here! ‘Tis me!

 ‘Tis me who hooves the cannon bell!

 To wake the summer dead out of their drowse.

 ‘Tis me! A mouse

 Of boy gone high in belfry dins!

 Who with pure iron sound would douse your sins!

 All, startled, listen, rouse,

 And come, drift-dusted down the roads!

 I summon you with freshly washed pink toes

 And bell-creased crimsoned heel,

 Upon my back I bicycle the wind

 To rotor-thump the bombshell clangs!

 Its great mouth hungers me;

 I feed it feet.

 Sprawled laughing, bell-sound in my lungs,

 Prone underneath,

 The sun all gone to shards, asplinter in my lids,

 My mouth blood-rust from giving shout

 To answer iron shout of bell:

 Here’s heaven! heaven! heaven!

 Bang. Not hell. Not hell. Bang! Not hell!

 Until the church below is full of summer breath

 And priest then wanders forth to make discussion,

 His nave much shaken to sense with wild concussion.

 Now one must cease.

 But sometimes in the uptilt, ever-frenzied dance, forgets;

 So priest must send on mission yet another boy

 To stop the bell

 To still the belfry and the iron-spilled joy.

 Now lie there yet awhile, fine lad, upon your back,

 As bell tilts down to quiet, soft asimmer.

 Long before loves and beds are known you have known this:

 Bells are a loud communion,

 Belfry-banging bells are bliss.

 Glistered with holy sweat you lift your head

 And send a bright salt golden rain down free from brow

 With one shake, smiling.

 It blesses the distant ground.

 You touch the bell:

 It trembles still with sound.

 You touch the sky with glance:

 It shivers bright with quakes you’ve given

 It will, long gone days beyond, remember.

 You laugh one last triumphant burst.

 Great seas of prayer wait murmuring below

 Carefully, holding to your soul

 And sweet-bruised tender wits,

 You descend the belfry stair,

 Inexplicably wild with thirst.

 IF I WERE EPITAPH

 What would I say of me,

 If I were Epitaph?

 That there were silly bones in him?

 The grim but made him laugh?

 The jolly made him serious?

 The glum made him delirious?

 That lawyers talked him sleepy,

 And made him snooze at noon,

 But bed was his by nine o’clock

 So he could rise with moon?

 And roll upon the meadows

 While other people dreamed,

 With windows up and chilly

 He smiled and only steamed?

 They sealed him in a coffin

 But could not make him stay,

 His laugh too large, his smile too wkie

 For any Death to lay?

 No matter what the molder,

 The maggot in his bin,

 No measuring-worm could inch and cir—

 Cumnavigate his grin?

 If Universe should claim me

 And keep me with a sleep

 I’d open up my laughter

 And drop the Abyss deep;

 There we would lie all friendly,

 The empty stars and I

 And speak upon Creation

 And with God occupy

 The time that’s left for burning,

 A billion years to sup,

 Then open wide God’s laughter

 And let Him eat me up.

 IF ONLY WE HAD TALLER BEEN

 The fence we walked between the years

 Did balance us serene;

 It was a place half in the sky where

 In the green of leaf and promising of peach

 We’d reach our hands to touch and almost touch that lie,

 That blue that was not really blue.

 If we could reach and touch, we said,

 ‘Twould teach us, somehow, never to be dead.

 We ached, we almost touched that stuff;

 Our reach was never quite enough.

 So, Thomas, we are doomed to die.

 O, Tom, as I have often said,

 How sad we’re both so short in bed.

 If only we had taller been,

 And touched God’s cuff, His hem,

 We would not have to sleep away and go with them

 Who’ve gone before,

 A billion give or take a million boys or more

 Who, short as we, stood tall as they could stand

 And hoped by stretching thus to keep their land,

 Their home, their hearth, their flesh and soul.

 But they, like us, were standing in a hole.

 O, Thomas, will a Race one day stand really tall

 Across the Void, across the Universe and all?

 And, measured out with rocket fire,

 At last put Adam’s finger forth

 As on the Sistine Ceiling,

 And God’s great hand come down the other way

 To measure Man and find him Good,

 And Gift him with Forever’s Day?

 I work for that.

 Short man. Large dream. I send my rockets forth between my ears,

 Hoping an inch of Will is worth a pound of years.

 Aching to hear a voice cry back along the universal Mall:

 We’ve reached Alpha Centauri!

 We’re tall, O God, we’re tall!