THE NIGHT SKY II

1. Green (thought, shade)

The cicadas came and went. The blue moon came and went. Neither went the same way as it came. Across the river, the sound sheer and loud as if the air were rubbing against itself, unmolested molecules roughly scraping: sreek sreek sreek. The story got pieced together. At first I thought they were locusts; they swarmed hectic in the heat at the tops of trees: the river valley with its angry spirits: a plague upon your houses: the gothic fatal imagination. Enormous diffuse sound, without a single source. Every seventeen years. Then I thought the sound was of their eating the leaves of the trees, remembering the fat green caterpillars and the huge gypsy moth’s muted putty wings. But someone said they don’t eat, they copulate, and then they die. Tiny bright eyes like drops of blood when you prick your finger. Delicately transparent orange-veined wings. The floor of the porch littered with their corpses; some turned up, their thread-thin legs stiffening. In the strangeness of their ecstasy, the fabric of myth, remembering Persephone.

The . . . reason that you might think you do not understand what I am telling you is, while I am describing to you how Nature works, you won’t understand why Nature works that way. But you see, nobody understands that. I can’t explain why Nature behaves in this peculiar way . . . . The theory of quantum electrodynamics describes Nature as absurd from the point of view of common sense. And it agree[s] fully with experiment. So I hope you can accept Nature as She is—absurd. 1

In my room, the sound of something hitting against the window, a delicate thud like a small pebble. Early in the morning, not long after dawn. The windows filthy, a blur. Thrut, thru[t]. It’s a bird, beautifully subtle soft mauve reds, with a bright orange beak: a female cardinal. She has a loud voice; she chips on a branch of the bushy tree and then plunges into the window, pecking at it. At first I thought she was crashing into it in bird madness, driven crazy by the sound of the invading cicadas, a bird version of a nervous breakdown. I look for something on the window she would want, but see only the murky residue of winter weather. I take pictures of her, long tail fanning and wildly beating wings against the window, afraid that no one will believe my story of the window-battering bird. One morning, her mate, decked out in scarlet, is on the branch with her. They seem to be conversing; they peck each other. He flies away, she continues to fly against the window.

Why should we import rags and relics into the new hour? Nature abhors the old, and old age seems the only disease; all others run into this one. We call it by many names—fever, intermepere, insanity, stupidity and crime; they are all forms of old age; they are rest, conservatism, appropriation, inertia; not newness, not the way onward . . . . This old age ought not to creep on a human mind. In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts. People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them. 2

What we intuit is that something needs to be solved, that an impediment needs to be absorbed and, as it is absorbed, to become manifest. The subject trying to find its way out of the long sequestered drama of suspension. If the impediment is merely formal, there is a corresponding aridity, the aridity of convention, of exhausted iconographies, vocabularies, habits of mind, a pretense of discovery. If all that is happening is a mirror reflection, or the old vocabulary recycled into new technology, the result is quickly perceived as arid and stale. You cannot experiment with only the history of experimentation as your archive. The century, mesmerized by its own inwardness, sucks back into its frames so that soon all we will have is an attic full of empty frames to pass on. A catalogue of self-conscious reiteration, a stalled inventory of choices, half of mirrors and quotations like a family or a nation or an institution unwilling to change its self-perpetuated image. But we know from basic biology what happens when such willed enclosure occurs: a gradual weakening and perverting of the very traits that were once admired for their efficacy
and beauty. "The field cannot be well seen from within the field," Emerson remarked in 1864.

In a high room, overlooking festoons of it, coming down into the cool color-striped predark, robins on the grass hopping and stopping, the pond flashing under wavering branches, titles sterned about—the Illusion of the End; Frame Structures; The Castle of Crossed Destinies.

It was Him
Power of the Clouds
Judge of the Dead
The sheep on his right
The goats on his left
And all the angels.

But from the book
backward on their knees
crawled neolithic adventurers known only to themselves.
They blazed with artifice
no pin, or kernel, or grain too small to pick up.
A baby with a broken face lay on the leaves
Harshita—a rough looking man
rushed by with a bundle of sticks.
"Ah, this is fortunate," cried Forebear
and helped himself to me.\(^3\)

Let's say there is always something outside the frame, lurking or knocking or waiting, unwelcome perhaps or unnoticed—the stranger or the strangeness that refuses to come inside, or that we ignore, or deliberately keep at bay. What happens if the frame breaks and this thing, this otherness, gets inside? Doesn't everything change? the frame as well as each thing it once held apart? And doesn't the fact of our acknowledging it shift our focus, alter the syntax from one of tidy resolution to one that verges on chaos, or cacophony, or meaninglessness, as we enter this suspended irresolute space of rejection and acceptance, until this strangeness is absorbed? It is the pressure of this strangeness that might in fact produce the work of art in the first place; the desire to accommodate it, to bring it into relation with what already is; we might say that what comes to be known of a particular age or spirit has to do with this adjustment, this inclusion, which alters old habits of thought.

Now this scrupulous realism, this aspiration to render exactly all natural details, is the characteristic feature of the spirit of the expiring Middle Ages. It is the same tendency which we encountered in all the fields of the thought of the epoch, a sign of decline and not of rejuvenation.

Apart from the occasional dream of fantasy, clearly framed and controlled by a realistic context, there is no surrealism, no magic realism, no mythic subtext, no overt intertextuality, no metatextual frame-breaking, no word games, no abrupt switches of style of type of discourse, no parody, no radical deviation from well-formed syntax, no unconventional layout and typography.\(^4\)

A pattern of dead insects on the green floor. But if

2. "there is no topic sentence"

then how to proceed? You go to a museum and you cannot look at what you are looking at without first reading the caption, tidily printed on a small white card and discreetly attached to the wall just to the right, or blown up into a narrative spooled onto the tasteful gray wall, telling you what you need to know in order to look at the picture. Of course it is useful to know that the artist was born in a place, at a time, and it is interesting to know the name of the person who loaned or gave the object to the museum, and what the materials are of which it is made, these points of orientation are undoubtedly important to understand certain things about the object you are viewing. But are there moments when you want to go into the world, even the world of the museum, and see what is there as if it were a raw fact, unmolested by these codes of telling?

When I say I believe that women have a soul and that its substance contains two carbon rings the picture in the foreground makes it difficult to find its application back where the corridors get lost in ritual sacrifice and hidden bleeding. But the four points of the compass are equal on the lawn of excluded middle where full maturity of meaning takes time the way you eat a fish, morsel by morsel, off the bone. Something that can be held in the
mouth, deeply, like darkness by someone blind or the empty space I place at the center of each poem to allow penetration.\(^5\)

Captions cannot provide a full context but only edified snippets, easily digested, to ease your fear of ignorance, your distrust of your sense of things. So you can leave the exhibition with the data as if it were essential; you can substitute information for your response. But this very data acts as a kind of leak into which the energy of the work is siphoned; the work becomes an illustration of its caption, and the caption proliferates into the weedy morass of captions in which we live. Before you can say "postmodernism" you are mouthing received notions of value or significance, and you have no way to truly know either context or example.

Miracle, the suspension of normal laws of nature, is to be seen less as an example of "irrationality" or credulity than as an instance of the symbolic interface of human and divine: it functions as a rhetorical device to express what is otherwise inexpressible. In much the same way, parable (currently a major topic of study from the rhetorical standpoint) surprises by suspending normal expectation. It operates by telling—not through argument, but by revelation, through hidden meanings. The texts rely on these devices; indeed, they lay some stress on their importance and on the difficulty of understanding them, as when Jesus says to his disciples, "unto you is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables." It is this feature, in particular, of early Christian discourse that deserves much more attention than it has received except through specialists, for it raises exactly those issues of language and representation that are now for us again problematic.\(^5\)

The inexplicable is inexhaustible. Without it we live in a barren literal landscape, in which every action and event is rendered into its simplest, most reductive, equation: this is this. In language, the birth of the new is often created by juxtaposition and analogy, wherein one thing is related to another to produce a third term. The system of unlikeliness relies on an essentially dichotomous paradigm, in which the world is carved out in bold oppositions: this/not this, yes/no, good/evil, day/night, love/hate, subject/object, us/them, and on and on. These are necessary couplings, but they have pro-

literated so deeply into our way of perceiving that we less and less tolerate the murky spaces between extremities in which we actually exit, and through which we come to make our choices, decisions, and judgments. Someone loves his wife and another person. A man who has killed two people is acquitted because the event itself is so profoundly entangled with historical and social parameters that it is impossible to decide on his, on whose, culpability. Time is not the opposite of space. Male is not the opposite of female. Democracy was never the antithesis of communism. The habit of opposi-
tions is as old as or older than the image of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the seminal site of instruction when curious, courageous Eve risks uncertainties of Difference and enters the moral, mortal universe.

For Danforth, in short, errand has the ambiguity of the figura. It unites allegory and chronicle in the framework of the work of re-
demption. And in so doing, it redefines the meaning not only of err-
rand but of every term in New England's Errand into the Wilderness ... The newness of New England becomes both literal and eschatological, and (in which was surely the most far-reaching of these rhetorical effects) the American wilderness takes on the double significance of secular and sacred place. If for the indi-
vidual believer it remained part of the wilderness of the world, for
God's "peculiar people" it was a territory endowed with special symbolic import, like the wilderness through which the Israelites passed to the promised land ... the American Puritan jeremiad went much further (than the European). It made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate. The very concept of errand, after all, implied a state of unfulfill-
ment. The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and New England's Jeremiahs set out to provide the sense of inse-
curity that would ensure the outcome. Denouncing or affirming, their vision fed on the distance between promise and fact.\(^7\)

An abyss opens up between the idea of a promise (futurity) and the idea of a fact (reality). Promises are one way the present conceives of the future; promises transport the vagaries of hope into concrete examples; they help us to align our desires to our actions, our intention to our will; they help us to braid the true into the fictivity of the real. A promise imagines a condi-
tion, a conclusion; it propels a syntax—the sentence comes to an end on the
trajectory of its promise. The "mist" part is from "nittere," send, which of course is related to "mission"—errand in the wilderness. Futurity is inscribed on the arc of a promise, across the temporal space that opens and closes between intention and action. But one might imagine that the promise is not of something known, concrete, tangible, but merely a disposition toward, a willingness to put at risk that which is already at hand. The fulfillment of a promise produces another, unknown promise. What if the pattern of language which knows beforehand what its conclusion is were subverted? Syntax and grammar might break apart, causing anxiety and terror, as if there were a shaky bridge over a cavern through which waters sluice dangerous currents, and the other side is only sunset itself and the old noise of unknown insects. A poetics which explores such risks is one that might be seen as responsive to the inertia of contemporary political and aesthetic discourse; the sense of betrayal when promises are emptied into a dump of false news, voyeurism, sanctimoniousness, waste sites of a debased and vacuous time.

But lest I should mislead any when I have my own head and obey my whims, let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle anything as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.

Or put it this way: reality appears to have outwitted us, has run off, out to the horizon and beyond into the sparkling not yet not here. And we, a band of disputatious kids, whining and exhausted, having come so far but not far enough, want to turn back and find ourselves in the safety of our old haunts and retreats, under the trustful eye of our goodly god or guide. We are glad for reason, and for the secular, but yet feel cheated, as if in our hurry to get to the future we had dropped our most precious belongings along the way, and now they are tangled in the overgrown path. It was thought, wasn't it, that love of beauty (art) would replace faith in god (religion)? It was hoped, wasn't it, that the beautiful would be understood as a sign of the good, the true, and so we could align ourselves with it without the invocation of a greater authority to keep us civil? We could not have seen how easily the discourse (the discord) of desire would ingest all spiritual, social, and moral resistance, strip beauty of its alignment with the difficulty of finding or knowing the true, and fold the moral imagination down until it was a mere blip on an academic syllabus or co-opted by those who wish to impose their values on others. The model of science, which has held our faith in reason, and by which the real is aligned to the true through test and experiment, has not so far shaped our moral imaginations or informed our spiritual quests.

"If we possess the why of life we can put up with almost any how," Nietzsche remarks.

"We have been a little insane about the truth. We have had an obsession," Stevens remarks.

When they find out—tomorrow, next week, next year—what happened aboard Flight 800 that made it disintegrate into a thousand thousand particles over the roiling sea—it will not answer the questions of the grief-stricken. They will not be consoled to know if it was a terrorist bomb or a mechanical error. The vulgar insinuations of the media demand that private incompprehension become public display, and that a microphone be shoved at the mouth of the weeping widow to ask her how she feels.

3. Let Pies Enter Arks That Reap Art

The Platonic and Kantian idea of rationality centers around the idea that we need to bring particular actions under general principles if we are to be moral. Freud suggests that we need to return to the particular—to see particular present situations and options as similar to or different from particular past actions or events. He thinks that only if we catch hold of some crucial idiosyncratic contingencies in our past shall we be able to make something worthwhile of ourselves, to create present selves whom we can respect. He taught us to interpret what we are doing, or thinking of doing, in terms of, for example, our past reaction to particular authority-figures, or in terms of constellations of behavior which were forced upon us in infancy. He suggested that we praise ourselves by weaving idiosyncratic narratives—case histories, as it were—of our success in self-creation, our ability to break free from an idiosyncratic past. He suggests that we condemn ourselves for failure to break free of that past rather than for failure to live up to universal standards.

Go figure. I had a really bad dream this morning. It seems I was to be a bridesmaid in someone's wedding while simultaneously I was supposed to be
made from those of the actual, had their source in its graphic, mundane terrain. As in a fairy tale, the world I was in would be converted, translated, into one of harmony and possibility; it was a primitive intuition, common in childhood, that there must be a way to redemption and freedom. My own fantasies formed around visions of decorum in which calamity and turmoil were miraculously rendered into a habitude of clarity, a serene setting in whose sanctuary there would be room for attention and receptivity.

The point is this: I needed to find figures or tropes to house these eventful figures and their consequences, by which to free myself from their grip. I needed to revise a claustrophobic and anomalous reality into one in which I had some choice, into which I could peer without suffering from its contagious degradation. Many years passed before I understood that the figure of my mother had slowly transformed into an idea: alluring, frightening, un Kemp, neglected, uncivil, primal, transgressive, dangerous, and endangered, she took up residence in my work as an idea: wild. I recall seeing a figure walking along the horizon in a slip—was it a dream? I don’t know—and I knew it was the outer perimeter, the limit, extremity, which would always escape the logic of syntax and the syntax of logic. The figure was the site of the unknown and unknowable, a conundrum of futility and fertility: the night sky. My father became the whole lexicon of absence and desire, of longing and delay, of beginnings, and endings, which realize themselves with each enactment of the writing process. He was the fable of escape from acute inwardness and separation to ideas of inclusion and community, configured as “audience” or “world”: the new morning’s day. This transformation of personal private experience into a poetics which might be congruent with other historical, epistemological frames offered a possible way out of an intractable subjectivity.

4. Strange Encounter

"Depression," I once observed, "is the better part of squalor." The easiest, quickest, and most ubiquitous of all escapes is the lit screen, where a constant rattle of voices and images obliterates the litany of lists that render inner life a fog sale of tasks: calls, bills, things to fix, to mend, to wash, to write, to ask, to read, to respond. Press the little button and here comes—The Wizard of Oz—slightly blurry on the aging machine, but nevertheless there they are: Dorothy and her affecting cohorts just at the moment of disillusion, when they discover the Wizard behind the curtain with his deceitful contraption: a
good man, he ruefully admits, but not a very good wizard. In dismay, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow each lament, and each is presented with what he most wants: the Tin Man, a heart; the Lion, a badge of courage; the Scarecrow, a brain. And Dorothy eventually, gets to go home.

This luminous tale illustrates how a literary imagination sets up play between figural and literal reality, making a seamless narrative which gives birth to the difference between them (there is no real Wizard) as well as the dependence of one on the other. Dorothy insists, when she wakes at home, that she has been somewhere, and she is right: she has moved from Kansas to Oz to Kansas again, and in that perilous journey has become the author of her own destiny, having lost not so much her innocence as her credulity, nor so much her will to believe as her dependence on others. I once asked my class of students in World Humanities where they would look to find examples of a "moral imagination." They stared blankly at me, wondering to what I was referring. They wanted more. Finally they answered: "a lawyer," "a doctor," "a priest," "my parents." Not one of them suggested a novel, a memoir, a poem, a painting, a film. Understand: I was not asking about places in which a moral code or view is prescribed or proscribed, but one in which the world is presented as one in which there are questions, irresolutions, quandaries, predicaments that allow the reader/viewer to negotiate his or her responses, responses which might quicken tolerance while enlivening inquiry. The moral imagination does not simplify, but wavers and blurs, complicates and elaborates, distinctions. Traditionally, the moral imagination is housed in literary structures where an imagination braids the sites of reality and truth by engaging our capacity to interpret, which, in turn, helps us toward moral clarity and ethical choice.

literal, a. & n. 1. Of, in, expressed by, letter(s) of alphabet (~ error, also ~ as n., misprint). 2. Following the letter, text, or exact or original words (~ translation, transcript, etc.) whence ~ISM(4) n. 3. Taking words in their usual or primary sense & applying the ordinary rules of grammar, without mysticism or allegory or metaphor (~ interpretation, I hear nothing in the sense of the word, with the ears as opp. other means of getting news), whence ~ISM(3), ~IST (2), mn.; (of persons) prosaic, matter-of-fact. 4. So called without exaggeration (~ decimation; often incorrectly used, as a flood of pamphlets).

literal, adj. (OF. [F. literal], fr. LL. litteralis, literalis, fr. L. littera, littera, a letter. See LETTER; cf. LITERATURE.) 1. According to the "letter, or the natural or usual construction and implication of a writing or expression; following the ordinary and apparent sense of the words; not allegorical or metaphorical; as, the literal meaning of a passage; the literal execution of a command. 2. Hence: a Literally so termed; so called without inaccuracy; as, the literal destruction of an army. b True to the fact, not exaggerated or embellished; as a literal description. c Giving a strict or literal construction; unimaginative; matter-of-fact;—applied to persons.

5. Rag

The space now is such that a horned roiled (figure) has no origin, is entirely the foreground, floating on a flesh-based cloud. The background is here, the horned roll does not arise from it. The demon floating has no origin, spatially. Spatially is emotionally here. I want to subject emotion to space; and also to subject observation to it.

As if Atlantis could haul the past up into the sky, the weightless void of a there that has no here, and dump it, disassociated and infinite, bursts of event, lost loves, revolutions, matter matter, murmurs murmurs, all the hoodlum detritus of our hopes, dreams, triumphs, and defeats, construed into the frozen region. The screen's flatness, the world's flatness. Loss of depth of field, of vision, of the tactile variety of hair, skin, limb, the disembodied wilderness in which we now live; metaphor of the cycle expunged, surface lifted up so as to exclude periphery and vanishing point, whatever illusions of inclusion we had invented along the way. A bar. Television on, sound on, music on, talk, eye contact, orders, money exchanging hands, things on a wall, scents. How much is enough? All on the same plane, on the horizontal field that is not horizontal at all but flat, upright and flat. This is the space on which the literal basks.

But the Object of your thought is really its entire content or deliverance, neither more nor less. It is a vicious use of speech to take out a substantive kernel from its content and call that its object; and it is an equally vicious use of speech to add a substantive kernel not particularly included in its content, and call that its object . . .
At City College of New York, where I taught, the English department was in a state of protracted demoralization that verged on despair. I will not enumerate all the reasons why, assuming you know something about the situation of public education and the general low priority it has in political will and public discourse. But I will say that students came to the college without the ability to read or write at more than the most rudimentary levels. Faced with the syllabus of a World Humanities, which included the Odyssey and Macbeth, the Metamorphoses, the Sandalata, and even some English Romantic poems, many students were simply unable to comprehend figurative writing.

A reading is strong...to the extent that it encounters and propagates the surprise of otherness. The impossible but necessary task of the reader is to set herself up to be surprised.12

The racism and classism hidden in the current pedagogical approach to the teaching of writing and reading is not something that is being discussed. Many if not most of the students at City College are first- or second-generation immigrants—Chinese, Spanish, French, Arabic, Korean, Japanese—and the view is they need to learn to read and write English as a special skill to help them get jobs; the young black woman who taught Composition called this "cash English."

"That American conditions have produced the opposite of Dickensian high-definition personality has to do with the uncrowded social space into which each new person has to insert himself or herself and with the subtraction of differences from diverse immigrant groups that is the first stage of personal self-characterization in American life. Cultivation, even manufacture of difference played the part in the nineteenth century European city culture of Baudelaire, Dickens and Dostoevsky that subtraction of difference played in the United States. This Whitman catches in his wonderful phrase "the loose drift of character." The "Making of Americans" as Gertrude Stein called it occurred first of all by those thousands of negations by which the children of Italian-Americans, German-Americans, and Chinese-Americans erased letter by letter the accent, style of laughter, customs of family life, dress, and idiom of the old country so as to be, at last, simply American. In every American personality there exists a past history of erasure.13

Among my graduate writing students there was a noticeable deficit of references to sources, literary or otherwise, outside their immediate foreground; among African-American students, I found a tendency to write from the perspective of racial identity that demanded a public stance toward the self, as if the self were a stereotypical example whose voice must uphold, and reflect, the most unnuanced and prolific negative assumptions about black life in America. Individuality was conflated with identity, approval seeming to come from the litany of cathartic self-expositions and exhibitions, the fast food of our social constructions. These students were reluctant to depart from stereotype, from set expectations, lest they be perceived as traitors to their community. They did not see that such loyalty also constitutes a form of betrayal, that the self-images they promulgate are largely those propagated by white racist America. This is a paradox, of course, where on the one hand you have an institutionalized approach to writing as self-expression, and on the other you have a numbing reiteration of status quo assumptions about identity, in which an individualized experience is forsaken.

The literal can be dressed up in figurative language, and this is often mistaken for poetry: banal situations and ideas gussied up (as my mother would have put it) in fancy, poetic, language. But powerful figurative language is based on the risky business of undoing the stale promises which threaten to undermine the real opportunities our particular ethos might hold. This idea of promise is not literal, not the usual junk jargon of opportunistic commerce, but is constituted by a vision that puts the past in the service of, at risk to, the future. American democracy, after all, rests on a few declarations that animate the distance between intangible promise and manifest fact. This distance is essentially linguistic; it embodies a literary paradigm.

6. She Thinks Too Much and Refuses to Go. In Fear of Abstraction,

she sidles up to a Particular. "Hey there, you with the stars in your eyes," she whispers, "love never made a fool of you, I bet."
"Can't say as it has. I like to stick to things as they are."

"Like?"

"Well, you know: breakfast, lunch, dinner. Early to bed, early to rise. Two heads are better than one. A stitch in time saves nine. I like, in particular, numbers."

"But numbers are more abstract than anything else! Remember our credo: No Ideas but in Things!"

"Quite frankly, I never understood what the good doctor meant by that. I suppose he must have meant that ideas are formed through or by the relationship between things, on which so much depends. But things, if he meant objects, do not have ideas, only persons do, at least as far as we know. It must have had something to do with a desire for a poetics based on the objective real world rather than on subjective perceptions, so-called, of that world, feelings about it. It is the empiricist modernist monkey on the back of the solitary weeper. Of course Stevens tries to subvert this intolerable duality by bringing imagination in as a major figure, ready to make love to reality. Wittgenstein gets it right when he talks about color and pain."

Or look at this:

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Our errors at zero: milk for mist, grin
for limbs, mouths for names—or else hours
of barks, stammers and vanishing, nods
along a path of dissolving ice. The sign
we make for 'same as'
before whatever steps and walls,
shutters flapping in the lighted body
called null or called vacant. I'd wanted to ask
about dew, habits of poplar, carousel,
dreamless wealth, nets, embers
and folds, the sailing ship "desire"
with its racks and bars
just now setting out. This
question to spell itself. And the waves of us

following what follows,
retelling ourselves
what we say we've said
in this tongue which will pass."

7. Penance/penance

Gentle Reader:

I had not meant to complain, but to celebrate, as the urban might be said to celebrate the peripheral and autonomous, gathering in and giving out in untold narratives, creating an infinite pattern of possible coherences. The fact that the millions who live there are for the most part indifferent about the enterprise of poetry is often liberating, almost giddily in its implied freedom. When the bus loops up out of the tunnel, and the city comes into view like an enormous postcard of itself, the sense of this vast animated map of human will, thwarted or not, is one which suggests that there is no centrality, no apex, no order other than the one each of us single out, like a constellation in the beaded veil of the night sky. I get to bead my own constellation and then to fling it up, an image traced on the dark for all, or for none, to see.

Or you may leave it forever
and never return to it
for we pos sess nothing
is the realization
Anything
since we do not possess it
We need not destroy the
at any moment, it might reappear and
Would it be a
and thus pass:
seem to be repetition?
and so be the present
burned it, but since we don't,
and how un certain it is

and how anyone knows a host the future