

We sink by ones
and sometimes twos
but when the surface, breached,
has closed again,
by ones.
The bodies, water weighted,
floating down,
all free of knowledge of the rest,
drift nestling to the sand.
The fish, they eat,
as well they should.
We tasty mariners,
aground, asea, alone.

Ah the sweep, the scope, the glory,
Candid speculations, oh, so kind.
Who should believe that we are fair?
We do, we say.
Such chants enlighten —
Make our day.

Would wishing make the wind blow
a drachma at a time?
Each small crime
we wish to make
is neither low
enough nor fake
to change financing of the clime.

Collectively however,
all's affected
all's effect.
Thus eternal dialect,
we be cause,
woe effect.
Whither wander,
wander, wander?
Wither self respect?

Grand designs, oh friend, grand, grand designs.
We must but venture, try, and strive.
Cities founded in the waste;
Countries healed of evil aims;
Endless ends attending human works.

Slowly the dog got up and
 crawled under the bed and
 shed some hairs in
 doing so.
These hairs, they clump in corners,
grow, and drift a little.
By God, they lurk in silence.

So we'll pass the
 worthy worthies on the road,
In our plodding, nodding way,
In our nodding, plodding way,
But they'll gather all the halos
 with hozannah and hurray,
Just because it's they are they.
They are they, and hell to pay
 won't ease the load,
But sunlight glimmers in the morning
 on my tea,
And I see that what is prime,
 what is major, most sublime,
What is best to be's not bloody nor too bowed.

How, if decadence be sentimental,
 can those who beat the decadent then weep?
How can the gentle opposition age
 in grace
When it has ordinary buffetings
 to face?
Some grow, grow old, and grow, perhaps,
Me, I see the decadent decline,
 and fail to sleep.

Tide in, Tide out,
chips at the mellowness of islands.

Note after note
identical save pitch,
duration,
timbre,
spacing,
accumulating
geologic of its own
geologic buried stillness.

Now is not the time.

Time is there
on tide washed rocks
split by patterned sound
and sunk in time
in mud and glory,
poor, buried, once and future things.

The woman puts the quaver in her
 voice when singing of the gone.
The cat lays out upon the
 floor knowing only now.
Scholars pick the bones while
 keeping broth abubble.
The dawn comes up.
The dusk decays.
And we grow old, grow old, grow old,
 for all our trouble.

Weep, weep, for what is lost.

What, would you waste your wealth in tears?

When what is lost can't be won, I would.

Well, in the morning we will see renewal,

Wanton, willful, wasteful starts,

and hesitating steps that say what waits,

while we do wail what seems like much

and merely is the passing wind.

A prairie, very wide,
the grasses of the meadow cast aside,
the dirt, the stretch of dancing field
is wide
and on the rim of vision, metal clouds.
The line is narrow cutting here and there,
the here is muddy smelling —
there is care
where helpless, mobile creatures dance,
while we, free willing
stand athwart the naked earth
with little rhymes designed to
placate
or atone,
apologize.
We are the way we are
and sometimes sad.
We look askance.
We do not think
we are so bad.

The slow
 the gracious letting go,
the little steps, the long delays
The days of rest without repose —
I once, you think,
 was one of those
Those others.
Now I wait
and while I wait I know
 The others are not me or mine.
Let go.

If one could, I will not say
look the other way
while time does in what one holds dear
Then one would be the better.
What one holds dear, a year or so
away is nothing to the current
folk — momentous things
go waste with wooden flutes,
and oboes, hautboys
cracked and playless.
Who cares what lies beneath the weeds
When one can crush the
current crop of grass by
merely walking.

I sit before my desk
So, just so.
Illuminate the paper,
Shade the room,
That all but future wisdom may be gloom.
Uncap my gold nibbed pen
And set to work on this, this poem once again.
Words, what I need are words,
Mellow, golden, brown,
Antique violins across the page.
I want, must, write the melancholy wisdom of the sage,
The scholar, who learns,
And chuckles as he writes,
And sometimes sighs,
Looks out his window at the apple tree,
Gnarled and old,
Bearing fruit,
Turns up the light to check a reference,
Wonders when, when the world last heard the cries
Of such as he.
Indeed, of me.

Of actions,
there is the doing, and the not doing.
Of the not done,
examples are
The laugh left unlaughed
The horse not ridden
and the thought not thought.
This latter is a unique example
in that
there is no instance I can give you.
This brings me to the second
category of actions
The done.
A thought thought is one
This poem is another.
They are the only examples I intend to give.

There are, this morning, on the river, swans,
And just now, near the shore, swimming, geese.
For this, sufficient reason is that now it's Fall.
(Sufficient reason is that sense of destiny
that shapes our acts.)
I make myself clear, I hope, to you.
It's a matter of an
inward-consciousness-directed grasp of things,
Swans and geese being, in this technical sense, things.

In Plato's cave the shadows dance
While solitary scholars spin,
That nausea may a learning win
And wisdom be the same as trance.

I'm afraid of that coven of skyscrapers
huddling together for warmth.
One of them is mad at me;
I kicked it in the elevator yesterday.
It's dangerous to have a skyscraper mad at you,
It could drop something on you in the night
And nobody would ever know.
I'll hide in the subway
but the trains might eat me.
Maybe I'll go to Coney Island.

We shall by machinations
deceive the truth and thereby
satisfy all things,
the just and equal
and home and love
And all things written down.
Admit there is in part the other,
agree when things agreeable seem.
Magician circumvent the world
and drive home after dark for supper.

If Sigmund Isaacs pulled well the cork
on a bottle of muscatel
That was a gala evening.
Drinking it,
That was different,
Drinking it, he always spilled.
That was normal.
But to open neatly
And in under three minutes
Not to splash
On the paintings
Or upset the ashtray into the television
Made drinking worthwhile.

Wake up, Henry,
It's time to cheapen the day.
Have you sanded the sugar?
Watered the lettuce?
Very good--come say your prayers.
Remember our special on damaged hours,
59 minutes.
Our clock is bad;
People won't know.
Henry, indeed, you are a joy
in the midst of tribulation.

Can I help you?
You bet I can.
We're the only ones to offer such.
They may say they give you so,
But
We do too, and throw the other in
At no less increase in the cost.
Believe me.
We're the best in all the world,
The whole wide wonderful world.
You'll sign?
Congratulations.
We love you.
Have a chocolate (they're free).
We love you very much.
Don't eat it too fast, here, have another.
We love you deeply.
You should put on a little more weight.
You're thin.
Congratulations again.
Next.

Hear those
Morning songs of birds,
Songs of lust, and food,
and private territory
How ugly it all sounds
to those of us who know.
I put out poison for the things
and hymn the sun myself.

Every Spring the hills wash down,
The streams fill up
And stagnant Summer sits on air
Oppressively.
Then in Autumn I
With my shovel
Dig rivers deep,
Rebuild the hills
And breathe through Winter.
Seventy years I do this,
Then I die
And it is done no more.
Take warning.

The fire devil in the forest
Spat
and spittle crackled in the leaves.
"To be wet is not a sign of weakness,"
thought the god.
Good phrase," he hissed.
"must remember it."

Would that things were what they seem
and we were wise.
Yellow leaves and naked limbs
and cloudless skies
disguise the coming storm,
the future rage.
I dare not see,
I close my eyes,
and slowly, inwardly,
I age.

Soliloquy of a Hermit Crab

The knowledge eyes bring of myself
Can't go beneath my shell
But deep inside I somehow feel
All is not well. All is not well.
It seems I've grown. My selfless shell
Oppresses comfort once I had.
My burning, tender, timid skin
Finds ancient bumps that drive me mad.

Recall the tides of '42
When seaweed last in the dooryard grew.
But tide and time for no crab wait.
Sad little buffetings of fate.

Bird
Don't chatter in my living room
I don't want it
I want to hear the walls be walls.
If you sang of brooks
Or meadows, or air,
Well, alright.
But just to chatter in my living room,
No!

If at the beginning of time men were non-existent,
Then at the end of the day children must be put to bed.
Allright Charley sound the drum.
Turn the lights on, Sam.
It's time to let the people come.
I'll take the tickets at the door.
We'll make them feel at home.

What does it mean to say at night, "Sleep well"?
Did the head of Charles First really fall
and England live,
I ask myself.
The trains still run on time,
and English mothers push their prams
on dirt that holds the blood of kings.
Sleep well.

The interurban transit people
ran a trolley past my door
right over there the stop was;
grass grew through the ties each spring.
Used to trim it
Yes I did
Nice looking place I had
neat and bright.
They took em out in 43
The tracks
I took a couple of ties for front steps;
Held up real good till that guy drove into em.
They gave me a hunk of rail too.
I use it for an anvil when I need it
Which I don't much now
being older then I used to be.
I keep it in the garage
Heavy thing
Surprising how much it weighs.
I can hardly heft it up these days.

Along the face of valley H
I trace the wreck of broken glory.
It does not signify,
That this high heap of bricks
Has been a factory.
Dew sits wryly on the grime of vanished trains,
Then melts.
There is no pity in its condescending cleanness.

It's the Good Life that I live
Perched atop a cup of tea
Sipping biscuits with my wife,
The Good Life.

The kitten ate the pepper plant
And now is foaming at the mouth
Charming elemental strife,
The Good Life.

Why can't I ever even see
A day without the padding?
My edges cut me like a knife,
The Good Life.

The antechamber burneth
The fire scratcheth at the door,
Asks to be let in
That it may destroy.
Destroy!
My gentle, pleasant parlor.
I shove it underneath the door
A doily
To stall for time to think.
It pauses, scratches louder,
And one by one I feed it
Chairs and ottomans,
Alphabet blocks,
My rocking horse,
The player piano,
The family album
The congoleum rug.
Now there's nothing left.
I sit naked in a naked room
Which echoes when I scream.

Dear, I have a subject for a poem.
These shadows on our lawn
Still cast by last week's
Conflagration,
The burning of our house.
The shadows of our neighbors gliding
On the grass
Bringing the shade of water
Taking the shades of
Cartons of
Our papers.
Wind ruffles the grass
Water spills
Papers burn
The shadows flicker darker in the brighter
Last week's light.
Dear, isn't that a subject?
But I'm not the one to write it.
It requires a factual treatment,
Not mystical.
Simple description.
You are better at that than I am.
Let me get you some paper.
Good.
Now write
Simply
What you see.

How much point would a light bulb have
If a light bulb had a point--
Thomas Edison knew
The great, the good
Wizard
of Menlo Park
Trouble is, he's dead.
But, praise God,
His voice was preserved
It says, "Mary had a little lamb."
It's code.
It's got to be.

IBM cards
carted to the lake
To build a boat
From which we guard
The swimming of the swan.
Commuter cars bring correspondents
To write the wrong we do
Pardon the pun, but word play is the only play I do
word of life, and all that.
The books I write are full of such things
Such as
Slowly sinks the swan,
Which is alliterative, at least.

Why do I only whimper?
Why can't I ever howl?
My tear drops stain this page,
My rage
Endureth bounds.
Why can't I break the face
Of he who does all this to me?
You know why, fool.
There isn't anyone who does this.
These things just happen.
There is no one to blame.
(I write this waiting for a broken IRT.
Then,
Trembling,
I neatly wrap up my umbrella
And hold it gingerly,
Point forward.)

Adam Smith sat down to tea
And into the stillness of the parlour
Pronounced
"Money obeys scientific principles much like water.
In bulk it is tidal,
Depending for its swell and ebb
On the relative positions of the sun and moon
And other, as yet undetermined factors.
It lives an endless cycle,
Dropping like the gentle rain from heaven
Upon green hills,
Descending from thence stage by stage,
Collecting finally in vast seas,
From whence it evaporates, to begin afresh."
Thus spake Adam Smith at tea.
To which the Duchess responded,
Amused,
Prettily holding her teacup in her tiny jewelled hand,
"These vast seas of money you speak of, Mr. Smith,
Are they not salt,
As tears are?
For it is a wearisome thing to tend money
Is it not?"
Adam Smith smiled thinly
And sipped his tea in silence.

We went around Europe and everywhere and uh we saw a lot of things. Like um for example we saw a lot of old churches and ah some had those paintings on the wall; you know. Some of them were interesting but ah a lot of them had peeled something terrible. Oh you know you could recognize what they were, like the apostles and such, but um you couldn't make out the features too good. You knew what it was because you knew, you know what I mean?

There are those who say the railroad train has had its day.
Of course the steamboat races have long since stopped.

Did you see "Gone With the Wind?"
Yeah, and so did my mother when she was a little girl.
Interesting, wasn't it?

An old wagon wheel will make a fine rose trellis,
several, cut in half, a lovely fence.

On the smooth-flowing river some afternoon
We'll let the boat drift where it wants,
Or rather the river takes it,
And we'll stretch out in the sunshine
With our shirts off,
Between the seats.
We might even fish, but I doubt it.
It's so wonderful, the sun on your back,
The boat slapping back and forth
With the little waves.

Put your trust in God, my friend,
And all will be right in the end.

The point of a pun
(If a pun need a point)
is a good one:
Wit that is won by the wooing of words
has its sense.
It is sound.
Words may be tools
but they master their master.
In the beginning was the word.
God said delight
and delight was.

Gospels four guard the door of heaven.
Rains that pour (or is it salt)
Into the wounds of Christ
Wash the blood from out the lamb
And down the path,
The yellow brick road
To heaven
Which gospels four stand before,
While I, with bloodless water, rhymeless rhyme
Wash betwixt the painted bricks that line the Styx
And so decay.

Did you think I sang and danced before the idol?
Good gracious me, no.
Good gracious me.
We talked of understanding
and the world of song and dance.
Talk is precious, dance is cheap
Don't you know.

In the Spring of 1893
One day
I left your mother alone for a few hours
At the Great Columbian Exposition
And went to see Little Egypt.
There was a woman, son.
White, white arms,
The dainty toes,
The black, loose, swinging hair,
Such wild exotic music,
And her dance,
Her dance;
Of course I never told your mother,
I wouldn't tell her now
Were she alive,
God bless her,
I couldn't.
But for twenty-five years
At night
That eastern dancer filled my mind.
It's a thing I am ashamed of.
Even the night you were conceived,
Even then--especially then.
Your mother was a Godly woman,
And I loved her,
But she wasn't Little Egypt in Chicago
Dancing naked for the crowd.
God forgive me.
Forgive me, son.
The devil has his ways;
They're mighty hard to fight.
Tomorrow you're leaving for the trenches.
I suppose you'll get to Paris.
Take care, good care.
Don't do what I did.
It isn't good.
Your Ella is a fine, fine girl.
Come back to her;
To her, son, hear me.

Is old different than young?
In 1916 Rex Stout was writing short fiction.
I don't understand.
How?
Why is it different?
[Stop
Hard Breathing
tears not wet
Breathe steadily
Calm]
There was a feeling
How can I write it down
If you speak
I lose it
I know I will
Frustration and screaming
Yes
I don't
I can't
1916
and country and green
and Henry Ford
and Scream
I must
1916
Why don't you say anything
Sit there reading Nero Wolfe
1916
Not even the 20's
How can I tell them I don't know
That what hasn't happened
What is still green
Looks alright yet.
Old is different than young.

How good and simple once we were,
Before we knew,
Or wanted to.
Gene Autry shot the bad guys in the gun.
He never shot a horse,
It wasn't fun.
The moon was high,
Yet near enough for Buster Crabbe,
And that was quite nearby.
Now nothing is so good as once it was.
Alas.
Oh, strong right arm in the barroom fight,
Good night, sweet prince, good night, good night.

Sweet, sweet Violet
Stretched her legs
Stretched her legs
Sweet Violet did,
Sweet, sweet Violet
Stretched her legs
And now she's tall in the saddle.

You can be taller than she is,
You can be taller than she is
Reach for the sky
Oh reach for the sky
Now you are taller than she is.

So basked he in April's sun
Heated brow beredding while
Showers saught to cool
His harbored ardor vainly.
So he lay, the heirator
of thousand year lengthed verse
hearing only working worlds
bringing Maying on.

Did Bronson Alcott spot the road to Heaven,
Kick the traces from his ox
And ass and maidservant,
Plant his fruit trees, sit and think?
What of it?
The fields got plowed
With his neighbor's ox,
By his neighbor with his different vision.
There was room for both.

Vachel Lindsay heard at midnight
Bryan ranting through the stars.
Thunder rolled about his ears.
The whirlwind tossed his fringe of hair,
And from his mouth the lightning flashed,
And crashed, and bashed, and dashed, and mashed.
With palm leaf fan he smote the world,
And Vachel Lindsay gloried.
Bryan spoke of rending worlds.
Ten thousand trumpets were his lungs.
"Boom," wrote Vachel Lindsay.

I have read Mr. Tennyson and I
think he is a very nice poet.
He uses words very well,
paying attention to when words
sound similar,
when sounds are skew symmetric
when syllables place themselves in diagonal opposition
and vowels and consonants cut transverse across the lines.
His geometry is faultless
Euclidean romantic,
His rhymes and rhythms follow necessary truths,
Aristotelian logic, to be sure,
Yet warm and weepy
Brown, and smelling of tobacco
Possibly not entirely wholesome
Yet what can be expected?
fields were never green in summer until the color snapshot.
Mathematics is all they had.
Though still it is really nice mathematics.
I like reading Mr. Tennyson's poems
very much.

My dear friends
(Oh nocuous phrase)
(The praise a phrase betrays these days)
My dear friends
(That's good, the previous parentheses)
(Now, concentrate)
My dear friends
(They'd kill me if I let them)
(Unless I wanted)
My dear friends
(Friends, fiends, the lot)
(What gave me them to educate)
My dear friends
(Look at them, think what they want)
(Well I shall take them beyond themselves)
My dear friends
There is no pie
There is no such thing as pie.

Go ahead
dissect the times.
Analyze.
I bet you're wrong.
Oh, go ahead
But I do resent
You wise guy know it all
Telling me these whys.
Look, I like potato chips.
Can't that be not important?

Lurching through a railroad car a father,
Carrying water for his children,
Drops his bucket, sits and cries.
Don't cry over spilled water
Someone tells him sternly.
Someone else pats his back
Shakes his hand
Looks him in the eye, as if to say, I know.
And helps him look for his bucket.

God,
How much thunder
Runneth over my cup?
Not thunder even,
But a truck,
And it punctureth not
Its tire
Even.
It doth not
Damn it.

Once in Venice, swimming past
vacant eyes and tired feet,
Venus looking for her shell
came.
Bottecelli kept it she
Said to a policeman who
Waved her on to a
gondolier who
overcharged.
She ate gelati and returned again to the sea,
unborn.

I want to write a poem on a piece of paper.
At least, on the surface of it,
Not on its essence.
To extract the essence of a piece of paper
is profound,
But it makes it
Mushy
And hard to write on.

Sing, sweet unbent bird,
Sing, sweet eagle.
Flag draped
Honey lipped
Eagle.
Sing, sweet eagle.
Softly scream.
Nicely, nice scream.
[Nice scream--
Could be the name of a dessert.
A just dessert?
It doesn't matter.]
Sing, sweet eagle.

I want you to meet my friend Boris the Forest.
Hello, Boris the Forest, I said.
And Boris the Forest slowly leaned himself on one oak elbow
and said hello
though it sounded only like a small bird in the poplar trees.

Oh no, said laughing Henry,
His face and voice bright red,
Before I'd ever go to war
I'd go to bed instead.

I'd go to bed instead, he said,
His voice and face now chilling
Before I ever went to war
I'd dream about the killing.

Bertie Russell's dead.
He who thought that all is one
And one is a class of classes
Dead, the noble truth-man.
Oh, where were we in 1910
When morning stars sang together?

What is truth, said jesting Pilate?
Is it
here?
Is it here?
If I speak what I would hear
Is it true?
Words are words are words are words.
Do they say they say?
They lie.
What is truth said jesting Pilate
Not pausing

Feather full and feather fallow,
Fashion fills the need for love.
Rocks and carpets go together,
This is all that children prove.
Come live with me and I will move
Adoption of
The things we love.

These wordlets trickle on across the page,
and as I write, I age.
When living won't congeal in words,
A deed becomes a necessary act.
I rage.

The years go slow.
Just time to mark a line upon the face
of one I know;
By these I tell my age
as years of trees are ringed into their wood.
Trees, friends, myself, we all grow old.
It is not good.

I thought
that since I wasn't doing anything else
significant
That I'd make a tape
about why - ah
I wasn't doing anything else
significant.
You know, I was just thinking
earlier tonight
It's been at least what
oh, 196--5, I think
since I've written a poem
1966 maybe --
three or four years --
It's a long time between poems.
But I haven't got anything else
now
to write a poem about.
I suppose I could be cynical
and say
I haven't written poems
lately
because I have too much money.
It is true
that the last time I wrote a poem
I didn't have a great deal of money
although I had enough
But then I didn't need a great deal of money
although I needed enough.
I had enough for what I needed
and now I don't
That's true.
I suppose I could be sentimental
and say
that's why I haven't written a poem lately

(nickelodeon piano music)

"I'd like ta see ya try it."

"Oh yeah"

"Hey you, listen to me; I've
been arrested but I'm innocent."

"And so have I been brother -
49 times."

"The fine is \$25."

"I won't pay it."

"Oh yes you will - you'll
either pay it or you'll stay
right here."

"What, you again?"

"How'd you get out?"

"Can I give you a lift?"

"Get me away from here."

"Which way'll I go?"

"Oh, oh."

"Ha, ha."

"Say, ah -- did you drive an
escaped prisoner?"

"Why yes, I did."

But that's not it.

I'm sitting here watching
an Edgar Kennedy two reeler
on my Panasonic television
being played through my KLH speakers
and drinking my Ballantine 17 year old Scotch
and recording this on my Lloyd's cassette recorder
and I could

I suppose
say that I haven't written poems
because I have these things
and it's not true.

I haven't written poems -
Well, I could say

I suppose
it's because I'm old.

When I wrote poems I was young and I
didn't know where I was going and I d
idn't know what I was and I didn't kn
ow what I wanted and every sound was
new to me and I didn't mind trying oc
casional rhymes and I didn't mind try
ing occasional non-rhymes.

But now I've seen them all
and I suppose I could say
I don't write poems now because
I know how to write now
and so

I don't write
But that's not true either.

I've read but I haven't read enough
and I don't know how to write
even yet

But I still don't
write poems.

In this movie I'm watching,

"I told you to get out and
stay out."

"Oh now listen here."

"I don't care - I'm gonna
stay right here."

"Oh."

"Yeah - I'm just gonna be back
here anyhow."

(police siren)

"Here ya are, Mr. Kennedy."

"You have to get out,
Mr. Kennedy."

"Well, I'm certainly glad I'm
here."

"You don't want me to walk up
to the front door with ya, do
ya?"

(Slam)

(Scream)

"Stop him, somebody!"

"Ow."

"Ow."

"That man, he stole my purse!"

Edgar Kennedy's wife
has had her husband arrested
(cough, cough)
This Scotch is getting to me
(Cough)
But I still haven't got a thing to
write a poem about.
It was all a mistake.
Edgar Kennedy
shouldn't have been arrested.
But it still doesn't help me any.
I still don't have a thing to
write a poem about.
Hm.
I suppose I could be cynical
and say
and so I'll end this tape
and drink my Ballantine
17 year old Scotch
and not worry about
not having a poem to
write,
But that's not true.
Drinking my Scotch
doesn't help any.
Doesn't help me any
at all.
I still don't have a poem to
write
and I still know it.
Well, the Edgar Kennedy movie
is over.
It was a 'Radio' picture.
I don't know why -
I kind of enjoy
things like that.

"Say, who are you to try to
get in there?"

"Edgar Kennedy"

"But you're not going to throw
me in that filthy..."

"It's never going to happen
to me again."

"Hey you, come back here."

"Hey, what's the idea - you
can't do that."

"Well, try and stop me - ha,
ha."

(nickelodeon piano music -
chopsticks)

I have an enormous collection
of 78 RPM records
which I have taped
onto cassette
But I still haven't written
a poem.
Maybe I never will,
maybe that's it
Maybe that's the easiest way
of saying it.
How about a poem
saying
I will never write another poem.
That's not a poem.
It's a last will and testament.
All right.
Maybe it is a poem.

(Jingle bells on organ)

"And here's the Norelco electric
razor - the new way to say
Merry Christmas. Get the
Norelco triple header with cord
or with rechargeable batteries.
Give the flip-top 20 or the new
cordless and say
Merry Christmas."

"Norelco - even our name says
Merry Christmas."