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The Known World

By Don Bogen

University of Cincinnati

Every epoch not only dreams the next one, but also, in dreaming, strives toward its awakening. It carries its own end within itself and unfolds it with artifice...

-Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century"

Et leur chanson se mélée au clair de lune

Progress as the history of wheels:
endless tethered circles round the gin pit,
the measured creak of leather, harness clank,
clops, and pulley whining the day's lumps up:
heat in a horsecart, its wood rims nicking
on cobblestone. Or millstone grinding
the corn you rolled to the mill, the millwheel churned
in the swirls of the millrace. Paddlewheel
cutting steps in froth. Phaeton, brougham,
the singular conveyances of squires—
his light whip, your lordship, barely a question mark
before the iron arm jerks on its axis,
wrenching a grooved wheel over cinders,
spikes, the ties that bind lines for the wheels
of commerce: black funicular tugging hands
from the pit, the wheel to her very own treadle,
my dear, in the long hall, wheels of ships, and hidden wheels
that shut the vault's door or lift a glittering chandelier over the wheel of heads that turn
the hopes of the world: Empire, a massy wheel
fixed on the summit of the highest mount,
outposts, colonies, explorations that thrust
a brave torch into the cave—and its walls are lined

with diamonds—the wheel hefting our white burden, its dark spokes pulsing with goods, fleets
belting horizons, within its rim
round faces, food, fuel, nations, all debts
forgiven, your one mad whirling dynamo and frivolous velocipede.

* The wagon lit was glazed with ice. The master's voice
pinned us on air—such sweet French
with the odd gruff echo of St. Petersburg.
There is no gravity (this hooded,
a growl). Invisible strings there are,
lifting your body, so. We almost flew.

* Damp woods edge the sanatorium.
Lovers must come here, to pick
mushrooms now. Spruce and hemlock dripping
from a cool drizzle, the crawling shadows
under wet stones, gray heads half bent,
quizzical. To think of the delicate fingers
plucking them from soil,
each fat tube of stem lifted
with a hollow tug, its tip a spread
umbrella, a cowl. Parts flop
in their baskets: gills, fleshy
excrescences, flumes, filaments—
all the miniature channels, fronds and sacs—
a dusting of spores. Now
he is lifting her to her mount
and she adjusts herself, I know,
and the hooves are beginning
to clatter far beyond this window.
It is raining now, drenching
them, her blood
is up, her fevered
breath thin quick
puffs, the mushrooms tangled in the saddlebags
bounce on the flanks.

* lead to the inescapable conclusion that what we may best
describe as "the strategic faint" served at least two distinct purposes: while demonstrating beyond doubt that the lady in question possessed those attributes pertaining to a uniquely feminine sensitivity, it likewise permitted a sudden and complete retreat from awkward or unsavory circumstances—a breathing space, as it were. Thus the collapse of Lady Attley upon the untimely arrival of Sir Malcolm at their box, assorted whispers and consequent swoons during the intricate pas de deux that followed, and the predictably histrionic tottering and fall of milady's maid on the unexpected appearance of her mistress under cover of night may be considered to illustrate a chain reaction of spontaneous yet not entirely unrehearsed responses to particular difficulties. It should, indeed, be noted that a significant number of such attacks of light-headedness were no doubt induced or at least augmented by those rigid implements of fashion preferred by the sex for the modest concealment and definition of their delicate forms, such dual purpose reflecting most clearly a pattern of control and abandon parallel to that of the faint itself—we speak, of course, of "stays." In most cases the loosening of these whalebone devices, allowing as it did for the restoration of respiratory activity adequate to the scene at hand and granting a momentary respite for deliberation, was sufficient to ensure the victim a regained composure and, as an often unforeseen consequence, provide for many men the first surprising glimpse of the "unbridled" female torso since infancy, with results that may well become the object of further interest.

railroads. The Retired Major General Matthew Reynolds, M.A., Fellow of the Institute Our own decorous invalid, her wicker chair wheeled near the sea Secretary to the Minister The Maritime Assurance Society of the Port of Marseilles barristers, magistrates, other wigs and benches a first-rate inspector of granaries Counting Houses. P. Lapointe, Purveyor of Optical Instruments Distinguished fellow members of the Inquisitors Club, honored guests Dr. Forceps Mrs. Gridley's Establishment for Young Ladies Munitions. yeomen, sheriffs, singing blacksmiths an agent of the redoubtable Sir Joshua Inspector Houndstooth chief clerk hunched on the high stool her dressmaker, madam accomplished and talented, adept at the pianoforte, conversant in the modern languages, of most refined character and ready at once to assume the management of a small household Reginald Threadbare, tutor to the next Lord Hawley dubious would-be naturalists Discoverers of the Pole artists, dancers, etc. Artistes. Your Genial Host V. Casson Surgical Appliances Service: steward butler valet cook lady's maid maid-in-waiting parlormaid chambermaid kitchenmaid driver groom tradesmen vendors of fruit Ruined. ruined ruined ruined

Take China. Open the door and out comes the opium. Like
a jewel box, like an ampule, like a pillow
losing feathers. All nations
nosing the waking harbor:
cacophony of stacks, flagged
messages, winches creaking great wrapped
bundles into the gaping holds.
Will, diplomacy, appetite:
the early bird thus fur-lines
his nest. You may sign the bill
of lading over Peking duck. Coolies
half-dozing on the layered pallets—let
sleeping dogs lie.

Or the “dark” continent. If you
shoulder your burden—or, better still,
leave that to the bearers—
you pull out a sack of diamonds.
Or gold. Or ivory. Or anything that
gleams. One hundred coils
of copper wire, seventy bolts
Manchester cotton in eight standard colors,
fifteen hundred fundos of bubu beads equal
mineral rights. Thus free trade. Thus
development, the conversion of benighted souls
to the one True Path. Arduous, yes,
but have no doubt: they will, one day,
see the light.

* 
Alphonse, I have discovered,
is a fool. His tireless jetses tire me.
All that thrust and manly bravado,
predictable as an engine. In the end
he becomes a mere standard,
a shaft on the carrousel. I spin
alone around my own center.
The master, it is said, finds him
serviceable—he leaps but will never soar.

* 
Observe the latest Pole
ascending to the stage.

Exquisite, fashionable,
he keeps the common touch—
and melts every genteel
heart. How he can reach
into our very souls!
That torrent of moustache
across a broad profile,
those peasant eyes, a blush
of passion tinging his pale
high-boned cheeks—such
beauty, fierce yet noble,
enchants a jaded age.
As he stands before the hall
our brows grow feverish
with longing. We can feel
in the first faint brush
of his fingertips a whole
world: One Holy Church,
one homeland! Languid trills
lure us to the edge
of tears. His hands recall
plains, streams, a heritage
of innocence that still
must live there, to emerge—
only in loss. Ah, febrile
yearning for the rich
unattainable!
He speaks our language.

* 
The new lines belching suburbs. Where
the cheese seller edges the slag heap
rickety cottages sing the rails.
A neoclassical bank branch
imitates a temple. The mews totters,
its aging mares dreaming in soot.
Coughing behind thin doors,
endless hawking of goods in lanes,
sweeps calling—*Step here, Sir!—clank and
sizzle of the forge—all swallowed now
in the long whistle that scatters
shacks, shops, homes, carts and offices:
a petulant child’s suddenly discarded toys.

* We see you. This is a new
system. You are separate.
Boxed, hence untainted. Except
for the sins that have stained you
already. These time burns out.
You turn the wheel—many wheels
connected, turned by fellows
like you you cannot see. But
we see them. We oversee.
As here in chapel the Lord
oversees each private flawed
soul. In its pew. You are free.
Barred from transgression. His day
awaits us all. Let us pray.

* Woreied, I consider the Lilies of the Field—
and of the salons and the boudoirs and
a thousand other places. They blossom
each night in the boxes, positively
determine the season.
Even the Empress affects their coquettish grace.

Those layers of silk, stiff crinoline,
lace—how can they move?
While I stretch and point, they
spin in the world’s eye:
grand balls, the Bois, the smart
maisonnette in the last hours before dawn—

an endless whirl, all with the same breathless
poise. Their art is a fleeting
balance. Their toil, like mine,
the appearance of ease.

* Secede sign my manifesto denigrate
small minds shopkeepers warders of cultural
culture fig leaf bestowers cultivate masters

Cultivate a medieval grace carve that
frame flatten the scene to design to
points paint light paint strokes paint paint

Paint in Montmartre no on this harsh
cost here in the parks no back
stage in the open air in my studio

Study martyrdom act like a beast like
a bourgeois play the dandy the pederastic
aristocrat recluse raving monk

Rave in a garret starve on the street
corner in a stuporous café sipping
plonk brandies absinthe filling the glass

Your full bodied mistress forgives her pillow
forgets it sags it fills with scorn for
scorn forgotten in the fullness of time

* Why is Pierrot sad?
Because his sleeves have outgrown him.
Why is the moon sweet?
Because the soft lute sings.
Who sails for Cythera?
Time has dimmed the names.
What of this parchment fan?
It tells no story.
This yellowed lace and flounce?
Take us away.
Why is Harlequin rude?
Who plucks these fading strings?
Why does the boat glide?
Moonlight soothes the water.
What is the dim stirring?
Mist’s echo.
That distant tripping dance?
Follow.
Is this the shore?
The old moon sleeps in a shell.
Where are the masks?
Sea-tossed.
Where is the sweet pavilion?
Whose dreams are these?
Why does the dark lute sing?

Waiting

Stumbling through
night fog, fingering
pages, curled photos—fruit
man, drayer, are
you, carver in the
carvery of a fine hotel, the idle
Prince of Wales, waiting

Bearded faces all
masks, reflections in
display windows, red
lanterns of is it an
abattoir, waiting

Feeling my
way down the old
lanes veins runnels of the
flesh, what
place is, waiting

Sinking through dark
textures, wool
smother, muslin, webby

Your one-man staggering facts-and-figures library
of goings on by night. Your Domesday Jack. Tarts? I know how
many,
where, when, who, how old, how much for what, how sick, who
got what from whom when. And I know you.
The cut of your beard, your pipe, where you wait, each detail
insinuates
an entire world of taste. This one wants a wild beast, that a great
lady fallen on hard times, a dancer, pert gamin, naughty child.
Naughty, naughty! Please dear, you must spank this nasty wild
banker for diddling your clean petticoats. And, of course, she will.
Buyers can be choosers in this market. Whitechapel
is one long night-counter—be careful what you pick!
You must be curt, fastidious. I know what I don’t like
and dump it in the alley. All gone. Gentlemen, your rustlings
of silk, scented would-be mysteries, your bustles
like waddling pillows, peekaboo camisoles, layered stays
barbaric as gargoyles leering with their hooks and eyes—
all these sweet dandlings, Sirs, rest at last in the ragman’s sack.
When you creep home to your upright motherly wives, remember
Jack.

To be aware, at all times, where you are, yet
give yourself to music—to mere air,
finally: puffed, beat, scraped
into vibration. My shoes meet the floorboards
with a thrust the whole body
has memorized.

And forgotten—no, a secret
I know but can’t tell, there
in the muscles, working
like blood. Technique: sharp,
clear, smooth, a gem of ice that
frees me. Friction is a lie.
A certain familiarity with the materials.  
And simple tools. And  
the leisure awarded after a day spent copying orders  
for trusses or selling woolens or presiding at the high window  
of a ticket booth. And the instructions for assembly in their  
decorous but functional prose. The ability  
to read such instructions. The wages not  
dissolved immediately in gin or thinned by deductions for tools rent  
debts at the company store or kept aside  
for the invalid grandmother or hidden in a locket hung  
around the neck for burial fees.  

To instill some measure of pride in individual  
craftsmanship. And provide diversion  
for lives bounded increasingly by work which is repetitious  
and spiritually numbing. To create beauty  
in the modest home. And  
socialism. To construct one decorous but  
functional oak-and-cushion chair easily  
adjustable to any taste and suitable for instructive  
leisure reading in the small parlor under  
the lamp's cozy glow near the mauve flowered unbrageous  
Arthurian wallpaper.  

This fierce archaeology  
disturbs. A hunger for new  
old settings, still more chambers  
to the tomb, musty plunder.  
You can't tell what you're after.  
All that debris: curls,  

long strips and shavings planed off  
by the scraper—are these stages  
in a liberation? The papers' beige  
geometries thin to cottages, dulled  
sunbursts and at last thick petalled  
jungle blossoms big as sunflowers.  

Unrestrained, obscure,  
these night-blooming tuberoses may still  
entice. They are stripped  

inexplicable secrets: violet  
engorgements, damp folds of umber  
and ultramarine, a thicket  
of leafy conjecture.  
When you slice through the wall's flat  
hedgerow it leaves a scar.  

Whitewash it. For exteriors  
scaIing water, lye soap, bleach or  
astringent acids, as a last resort  
sandblasting which pocks the surface  
and is thus not always suitable.  
Nothing is suitable.  

Time stains, disguises:  
pale lintels steeped through coal years  
to the color of peat, red brick  
gone sooty or repeatedly painted red.  
You will scrub, chip and peel. Grit  
powders, sifts through air, drifts and  
catches, troubling a wheezing lung.  
An endless scratching at cornice  
and pediment, frantic  
as a prisoner's. Dusty treasures,  
hieroglyphs indistinguishable  
from your own hand.  

We are in a dark place. We  
see dawn only in thinning  
shadows, sunset in high streaked  
clouds. Time is flat. It circles
the cobbled square. Colonnades
stare at each other. Behind
the facade our galleries
wind to chambers. Consider

the walls' cool sweat, layers of
breath, nook, ledge and bench—these our
furnishings. Habits claim them
like a moss. Sit. Listen. Forks

nicking on tin, a chair leg
wrenched across the floor—the dulled
murmur of families seeps
from the ducts. Nothing echoes

in these little rooms. Mirrors
fog with your breathing. Will you
tell us at last what we owe?
Tell us what we owe.

A horse and cart is a delivery vehicle
A man with a valise is a delivery vehicle
Here are the wheels grinding the frozen plain
Here the brick factory drilling the bore
The hot shot cools in the mold
Here is your cousin speaking with the captains of industry
The caricature anarchist is a delivery vehicle
Here is a smoking bowling ball with a fuse
The royal seal pressed in fresh red wax
Here we go marching through streets gates great triumphal
arches town squares
A skittish bicycle is a delivery vehicle
The duke's full regalia fresh pressed for the review
Here are the light brigades horse marines gay fusiliers
Here is a means of full employment
The wheels of the delivery vehicle rust in pink slush
Here we are my dear with but slight inconvenience
Here is the map like a red dance
One languorous handshake is a delivery vehicle

Here is your velvet lined box
There are the boxes pitting the frozen plain
The horse and cart the straw the thrilling escape by night
Here is entertainment of the highest order
Your cousin's yacht is a delivery vehicle
Your valise my dear your maidservant manservant presser of
clothes
Here we go marching to the day's machines
Full employment is a delivery vehicle
A red brick factory making red bricks
The duke's cousin's royal delivery vehicle
Here they are stacked on the frozen plain
Here we are cooling in the mold
Here is a hushed note from the ambassador

Secrets of the earth.
Burn them.
Turf nicked out, tugged off
the surface with a scream of roots:
a hunk of the bog asmolder
behind your grate.

Older still,
coal. Asleep past the vegetal,
refining a slow
heat. Dense, mineral
ardor.

The miner's heartchair
was sacred. Boots
warmed by the banked ash
all night, dark lungs shuffling
toward dawn.

Nightsoil.
Raw, corrosive, it
defiles. Quick, crush it under-
foot, bury that harsh
nitric life.
You could
cook with it, if you
had to. Dung of the scrawny
sacred cow a marketable
basic fuel.
The lower
orders: warm humus.
Spontaneous combustion
of a bundle of rags sleeping
in a doorway.
That compost
is always on fire. Tiny
revolutions in the packed
organic stew, bounded,
controllable.
Yet these are holy
mysteries: silver filings set
to a corona overnight
in your drawer—a dark
implied sun—
unknown
light that marks the lungsacs,
weight so quick and
protean it exists only
in combination.
You will
sift the pitchblende, dear lady,
reduce to purity that one
unseen glow of earth, faint
growing ripple
in the blood.

Mon Cher,
But of course I am always delighted to hear
news—sad as it may be—from our beloved (alas, benighted!) homeland. And to rebuke the fair bearer of such grim tidings like the ancient tyrant?—Misha, you mistake me.
I have not been so long in this city of poets, composers and other fashionable aesthetes as to have thrown away my reason or my soul.

Poor Peter Ilyich! We live,
it seems, in dark times. These secret societies with their temples, ceremonies, backward handshakes, trick rings, codes

of honor (honor, indeed, that can lead a tormented soul
to its own demise)—how I despise them!

But enough. My work
is much the same: the girls adept but a bit ponderous, the boys still affecting that dated heroic passion which looks, oddly, mechanical. (Can you believe it, I sometimes see the entire ensemble as a steam train: all grease and noise, hot gas, rocker arms
and simply enormous wheels—pray God we get somewhere!)

Yes the parties
dazzle and, yes, I may have become perhaps the least bit jaded. But these countesses, you know, with their revolving paramours, the flocks of ever more praised (and ever younger!) breast-
thumping artists, coquettes, rich anarchists, those ubiquitous Poles plotting nationalism or stroking the ivories or furiously (always furiously) applying their energies to science—really, it is all a bit dizzying.

And terribly refined, you
may be sure. If I am obliged at times to play the hirsute primitive, God knows it comes as a relief! I long (secretly, of course) for the barbarous mother tongue, and have even been—once,
I freely admit it—to the church. So you see, my boy,
I have not yet gone completely astray.

In the end a fixation on ephemera.
The smoker transfixed by the way the meerschaum's curve complements the curve of smoke, the way the dying purple iris seem to grow from their peacock blue vase, the way the frame deftly entwines its flat medieval scene.

His lingering attention, thin, consumptive, veils each object till the glowing edge of memory begins to flare. Absinthe, talk like a fine wine forever on the tongue, rain-pocked alleys, winking jets of gas, the livid Metro's sinuous entrances a summons to the pit. Delirium:
hashish paints a self-portrait, La Belle Lune
and the dim rooms upstairs, night voyages
past street arabs, apaches, wrought iron blooms
cressing a lank maiden's thigh. Paralysis
blossoms. The long-lashed eye of the fly trap,
the pitcher's languid fluted lips—turn
your back on the dying age, these alone entice.

To think of the child who makes my shoes
in her workroom ... A garret? A windowless
hall? Invisible. Not that one watching
from the wings (I love her blatant stare), not
Clara or a pixie or a darling baby swan.

What can I possibly know of her?

I picture a needle, endless thread, taut
fingers, wrists, arms curving down to cradle
my bleeding feet. Handwork of dreams:
glass slippers, billowing gauze, a cat's pads
or a doll's gross pumps. For one night
scuffing on pink satin—imagine—
and toss the stained tools away.

Dreams of the grand constructors, genius
engineers! Their tracks are everywhere—
bright parallels stapled on the landscape, reaching
toward infinity over deserts under rivers around still
malarial swamps through mountains of coal.
The terminal an iron cathedral for
the worship of turning wheels, the palace
of glass, castle of factory bricks.
Nothing but what is massive, graceful
in the sheer bulk of its achievement—
O beautiful railway bridge of the silvery Tay!—
and layered with confident re-inventions
from the rifled past: the dowager Empress
as Ceres on a fat plinth, the royal head
bronze-laureled, forty feet high.

Yet there is delicacy too, in unexpected
places: pastel greens on the lacework
of bound cables drooping like vines,
the geometric dance of light in high gables,
the curve of the pissotière—everything lifts
and disperses in air. Consider further
the pure autonomy of the ponderous.
That span conveying apparently substantial carriages
toward us over the water is supported, finally,
only by itself. Near it, the skeletal tower
extends to no purpose but its own proof.

Leaning my bicycle against a wall,
I'd wander alleys, peering into the glass.
of shop windows for hours it seems, half lost,  
half following the instinct of a chord  
still unresolved in daydreams.

Boulevards  
repelled me with their brash high symmetry.  
I treasured fleeting visions: factory girls  
sharing a blushing secret, the startled  
grin of a tailor glancing up from his gray board,  
that cool blur of life in courtyards just before  
chipped doors hide it away.

I rehearsed  
the melancholy charm of work undone,  
worshipped the great, imagined a supreme  
unending lyric grace. The city's song  
of echoes, hints, rests, scarcely heard motifs  
entranced my isolate soul.

Tracing its ways  
one afternoon, I stumbled into a square  
thronged with common delights: bright tumbrels packed  
with sweets, frayed mountebanks cajoling crowds  
from their impromptu platforms, street artists.  
A bellowing shout was conjuring a band  
of the curious. It gathered in swirls  
as the lone man in the center lunged at its rim  
like a tethered bear. I drew near.

I have seen  
Pierrot and parti-colored Harlequin,  
those bittersweet pleasures of a former age,  
have watched a monkey tied to a blindman's wrist,  
a makeshift Punch and Judy on the run—  
but never this before:

the man adorned  
in chains, boasting as he flexed and pressed  
the links into his blush tattooed flesh,  
mincing before a clamoring ring of coins,  
cigarettes, loaf ends, trinkets, his thick cry  
taunting the rickety shoulders and toothless heads  
surrounding him—I suffer! I suffer! When  
shall I break free?

O Masters who can spin  

exquisite meandering beauty from pure air,  
teach me what music lies here.

- Rose petal tutus and the toes pumping like pistons  
Every man a corsair, every woman an orchid or a swan  
Refined from court ritual and, yes, the martial arts—close drill  
to fluent corps, jackboots to toeshoes, etc.

Break, Heart, and Limbs, Write in Flames!  
Come on feet don't fail me now.

The edge of the diamond defines the upturned breast as the  
ribboned cravat defines the neckshaft.  
Beringed hand grown fat on its cushion of coal  
Your pork butcher in disguise, employer of three shop assistants  
and a wife with a dazzling lorgnette  
Their Box Boxes Loge Stalls Stalls Circle Dress Circle Upper  
Circle First Balcony Second Balcony The Galleries Paradise

Dithering of the superstructure, a piffle  
Flower of self-reflective mass nostalgia: fairy-tale masquerade balls,  
trotting powdered footmen, dances of dancing dolls  
Romantic aristocrats and strapping peasants, an audience which  
is neither dreaming of both  

We celebrate ourselves.  
Our velvet boxes each have the very best view  
of other boxes. Our privacy  
is conspicuous, our taste so attuned  
to the careful distinctions of the latest fashion  
that if we chance to look across the hall we may see  
infinite reflections of our own sensibilities.  
We prefer the simplicity of the diamond,  
the calm assertion of black, and modest chat free  
of unseemly gestures or overt displays of feeling during the  
interval.

The rising chandelier spins this our world into facets  
and scatters them over a darkening sea of heads.

To be sure, we look to all great art  
for the logical extension of our values.
That a young man, infused with honor, will scale the pinnacle of ice, brave the roaring torrent and yet, of course, weep at the sight of his love's long lost handkerchief; or that a lady who has bartered her virtue will descend like a gaily colored silk, perhaps: some four hours fluttering and tossing light as it drifts from a carelessly opened window past lintel and knocker down to the common street. We expect flight, great conflagrations presented on stage, murders with verisimilar blood and have provided the machinery to effect these.

If, during a particular aria or pas de deux, one's thoughts may wander with one's gaze to the darkened side of the hall, what of that? One may even, at times, feel confined in his box before the spectacle like an infant too long dandled by his mother in the demanding presence of endless—oh yes, endless—relatives. The old may drift to slumber at the overture, but young hearts caught in that close dim glow will burn with their own fantasies set aflame by events before the footlights. Dearest cousin, I see my eyes reflected like wet stars on your bosom, in the sweet glittering ring at your throat. Do you assume what I assume?

* All the world, she says, knows. But what of the world? I know, the master (of course) knows, and the charmed circle of soirées would hardly be surprised if she threw herself from a bridge or under the wheels of a tram. Burdened, she will sink beneath the world.

Already she is unseen: vague and heavy as the past. She has become—much too suddenly—something only half-notice, dispersed yet still disturbing: in the practice room that faint smell of crumpled gauze, a child

somewhere coughing, the ragman's cry lingering in nearby alleyways.

Enter the icehouse. Vaulted, marmoreal, a smooth lined hole in the hillside. One snug spike of a bolt, doors chunks of oak or quarried limestone. Tug them aside. Here's cellarage for seasons. What packed dirt preserves keeps time off your muttonchop, drops a splinter of January in your sweating glass. A fine stuffed gallery of lost days: damp halls, faint expiration from the calm dark slabs, drip and hidden drain. Work stored here as in a compressed spring. You can hear mules grunting up the bank, curses in slurred Welsh, pick and tongs and sledge, flesh slipped off a palm from a sliding cake.

The river's thrust is stilled. It serves you. Sawn off blocks of sheer possibility. The past is stacked in these cool storeys. You can tap them, drag off an unwieldy hunk, or let the entire white mountain, if you so desire, shrink to a dribble. Come into this blank room. Put your hand on the lugged river.

* In moonlight who can tell shepherdess from swan? The shadows blur to one grand wash. A grayish hill flattens out within the false proscenium of elms. And now the spell has fallen on the stunned party. Revels done, the costumes start to pale, their hushed glimpses of skin cool, shrink and dim. Is this antique style
so easily undone?
The nice distinctions of each well-chosen role
are fading. Peasant, queen
and gamekeeper have no station.
Smiles turn vague, eyes dull,
their hinting half forgotten
or lost behind a fan.
Time stills. Old masks reveal
new ones. The hollow strum
of the lute disturbs them.
They don't know what they feel
or if this is a scene
on stage or if that fountain
sobbing with a will
so clear among the stones
it seems almost to shine
pure ecstasy distills
everything they sense.
Their lives are painted on
a landscape. Light is still,
souls invisible.

Wholesale transformations. As thus: your home
becomes a villa, the mill that built your home
a castle, the workers vassals disguised
as free agents selling their health disguised
as labor. What? Try again. That retreat
looks like a peasant's cottage: thatch to retreat
under in mild rain, big fireplace, crude pans
on the wall. Who gets to use the pans?
Note the subtly hidden servants' quarters.
Diverse obfuscation in other quarters
as well. Sorry. Now consider this church—
or is it a town hall hunched under a church
steeple? But it's not a steeple, is it?
It's an ornate medieval bell tower and it
came from Venice. Now it's here on the grounds.
Need I mention that these well appointed grounds
resemble a museum collection of town halls?
Gothic, Romanesque, all sorts. The halls

are named for industrial magnates and men of science,
some of whom, because of their work in science,
became industrial magnates and thus could pose
as squires. Students here are able to pose
as classless, free, devoted to reason.
Confusing, yes, but useful. One reason
few students are afflicted with consumption
is that their digs only look like mines. Consumption,
rather, of knowledge of the world, of history
cooked up all around them—the history,
say, of Pre-Raphaelite art confusing
the history of painting, the confusing
study of historical fads in the housing
of squires, mills, mines, mine diseases, housing
for millhands. You understand. New masks to mirror
the past seen in the present, which is a mirror
of the past, masked and hence exotic. Thus the new
science of archaeology making the old new.
Go on, dig it up. Set the whole temple
inside the museum designed to look like a temple
and study it. Study bricks, dust, the museum
of lungs, the man studying in the British Museum
the wholesale transformation of the known world.