

Ben Mazer

Tecumseh

[I]

Afternoon, languid and mysterious,
although perceived from one of many places,
is small and intimate, is infinite;
its meaning is in what goes on forever.
An anonymous statue in an obscure park
wards a few visitors to its desolation,
sweet smelling in a sunburnt shady breeze.
Walls limit sight. A single cardinal
fills windshaken trees with echoes of its song,
scratching in space the flashes of its movement,
distracting one from black coffee on the patio.
Over the wall perhaps the entire world
in thousands of scenes of action form a pattern,
and many rest, or tinker about a house,
leaving their driveways, or to them are returning,
always returning to the simple thing they are,
each one themselves, a complex of emotions.
But all that's hidden, and what there is to see
are only a bird, the trees, the wall, the fountain,
where nothing happens, beginning without an end,
unless it's in a distance so far off
that the lush needles and the ripe red berries
are cut down, not what they appear to be.
Yet he who watches from an upstairs window,
turning a curtain back to make a view,



wholly resides in simple clothes and slippers,
constructing within a pattern of his own
to thwart the harmony of hours and minutes,
as if old printed verses, word on word,
piled up the swirling dust motes of the morning
and marked an incremental calendar
with thought and gesture, motive and idea,
the impetus for many simple tasks,
and idleness itself were mental riches,
not wasted outside the compass of a room.
But here by the wall, up close, where neighbors squander
pipings and flurries of sounds the morning swallows
in its deft languid anonymity,
nothing changes, associating time
with a scene like this, though many years ago,
the subject of the gardener's repetitive hoe,
and childhood's musings, words within a book
that's seldom taken down to have a look.
Silent and still, its roots go on and on,
smelling of rich earth, and a fresh cut lawn
where no one goes. Even the gardener
must leave us to this final meditation.

[II]

He led me out of the intellectual tradition
and into the back yard
where like snares of autumn, clasps of spring,
the foliage curled about his crisp dry words.
So much that has gone before



lies torpid on the ornate stone bench
that's flat as waiting . . .
for ideas the mind seems to recall
of what is lovely, what has never been.
But that unresolved and fluid flux
of his words, originating in
the laundry room next to the kitchen
(where brillo boxes billow a decade's tide),
has impregnated as some furious leaping star
will above the moon the night of the school play
an actress spherically on the astral plane,
to glow in gas-works, private scrapbooks, yearbooks,
not only each soul of the babysitting neighborhood
or lamp that lights each window like a magazine,
with her one image, wordless, disappeared,
struggling homewards, past a father's world
of chains of obeisance, chains of defiance,
is impregnated with the telluric time you are,
knowing only the idea, the concrete absolute.
So fire dwindles. But to harness birds
as stars, retrace a dream, convert
those lapsed impingements upon a code of hope
to express eternal music with indifference
is only love—in any myriad form.
So he—tired and absolved
kicked all the lined up matchsticks of his theory
into the laughing bottle of his door stoop
to know unkind—the sturdy marble hallway,
as whisked away by maps as calendars.



No one is surprised by his ideas.
This is tedium and is comfortable.
But all the lined electric shocks of brambles
share in the patchwork query of the bridegroom
go he by falter or fine default
into the garden for a moment to stretch his legs
and make of the gardener one simple request—
to return here at any rate, not be
too crowded by these people who rose the estate,
Their charm is harmless, but the flowers are great.
So—to one room, anent the museum city,
as always were the backtalk of their talk,
and blue and black and green—not shedding dirt
to illuminate the mind night's city.
To serve thus such a gap of pity
on its own terms, as was meant by this.
His nature—laughter and
fluid and grave as a babbling stream
on a fine morning separated by the mountains
from all of this, the laughter, the cool tea, the gingham
as red as time peers through the town parade
in glacial valleys petering through to brambles
to condense all conversation to one word.
He knows what he is talking about. Not all the others,
who call him crazy, an island where a remote
cache of codes and maps rusts in a metal box,
as vigorous as his language in the sands
that strand and striate through the soldier's nerve
to serve one buttered bun in Queen's hospital

and dismantle a theory, mount a collage
of newsprint, bivouac the observatory
expecting nothing but this dull response,
the same argument that the brilliant actress
shines illuminably above our dreams and hopes
tethering us to good witness, and for awhile
can expect us at the hour of service
to be not there, beside the bed, the scrapbook,
the white phone, the white blanket, the white floor,
the bright phone, a leather yellow of silk
to tie these notebook drafts,
the diary of a young debutante.
Life has its meaning. By the library
a brook ran. To get across
meaning, but stopped by the night
only to measure the utterance of the heart's flight.
These files are closed, but can be shown to you.
It was easy to help ourselves to art supplies.
I also am myself. I will do anything you want to do.
But think how the strings of nights
go gently masked as law to condone madness—
“paid for by the community”?
The reserve is so great on these things
that these themes are repeated.
The Nobel Prize is given to the young
in the name of elders who have ceased to matter,
except as they were intuited, long before we ever met!
Unbent and grotesque upon a beach
at night the played out light



played upon the essential right
of the drowner O shadow who you love so much,
as you yourself loom large, confirmed in the space program,
never paying dues, being yourself,
and no mould breaks,
there is no visitor,
he folds under his towel
and visits the dark wake
while you look on, out of the shadow
and hush the laughter of a sudden scholar
to delay a moment on the floor
till things get ripe and focused—

These sheets of sound, have pound for pound,
expended fields of pergoram
and quorum, for time must have quorum,
delay little upon a neutralizing machine
of inhibitions, or of planned vacations
stalked by the weeks that follow
in a small metro capitol.

It is encouraging to find yourself in a movie theatre
with no responsibility as a guideline or window

and hence the line curves, as a coastline toward the pacific
spectral maelstrom of our world.

Time is ripe for fiction, not of the novelistic kind,
but that which grows out of friendships on railways,
on tennis courts in exotic communities,



gated above rocky mediterranean cliffs.
Sun squeezes the morning sweat, the high mountain rises
and burns your cheeks, fair from being so dry
until the outer cursory fades with orange juice,
a family of calendars, erasers and memos
to exclude culture from his possible rebellion.
His triptych eyes rescind laughter with a smirk
or a dry snicker, a snuffle through the nose
I understood best, the silent classics of the forms.
They may be for each man, like a stamp collector.
And that is true. But what they couldn't get
he stood in little need of utterance of.
His plans are his forefathers'. They are bricks.
The women in green eyeshade welcome visitors
and those in the highest service get to relax
for this is harvest and the October augury
of tea leaves and of freshly creaking tile.
They are just glad to sit and eye each other.
And all stand helpless, partaking of the dead
at the hour that sets aside the weather.
There is no need to reduce this to indifference.
At any rate he tried. But failed successfully,
completing his philosophy, unspoken as it should have been.

