

To a Young Man Seen Wearing a Bow Tie

Backlook: gullet-ribbon, really?
In gluey August subway smother's
Worn-raw forenoon of a Wednesday?
We flush damp, lean limp, seep fever,
While you waft easy, coolsome twenty,
Spruce-o and spry in bruise-blue blazer!

Throatfast hourglass fusspiece—pfft!
Such priss! What prim! So fogey-me-in!
Why then? Sinecured CV-bloat?
Nana-lunch in privilege-den?
Power-uncle flunkey-chat
On data-clots in cubicle-dom?

Pinkwhite paisley nice-kid neckbind—
Pure non-now! Blithing through tie-downs
Behooves. Book 'then' for your then-time.
Olding suits only the old-growns;
Fifth-Ave stiff-stuffs fray gray inside.
Clothes (life too), young you, nonce-blaze once.

Disquiet

Moments like this the surround shifts.
Your inboxes banked with urgent matters
Flutter like drapes, then fade to disclose
Some rubbed aftermath where wailing mothers
Slump on blood-splotched hospital floors.

Or if, that day, the surround consists
Of boulevards down which you amble,
Your shadow dimming shoes and watches
Glossy in plate-glass boutique windows,
With one deep blink it all peels away
And you sprawl, too filthy not to ignore,
Camped under roaring off-ramp arches.

The surround can flicker out even at home:
Sharing the sofa, feet on the table,
When the lived-in colors click to grays
Just like that, every humble thing
Now hateful, hated, bluntly reminding
That you who were partnered now lounge alone.

Leaving the Anne Frank House

After the fraught hush beyond the secret door,
It comes as a relief
To sit through the uplift of this epilogue film,
Collecting yourself to leave.

Upstairs, though you knew the story, you'd been ambushed
By her bedroom, so bare and small:
The tourists abruptly mute, and the Garbo stills
She had pasted to the wall.

But now, in this bright, glass-walled space, you watch
As a dozen interviews
Attest to the hope borne by her words, humble and potent
As the acorns an oak-tree strews.

On then to the gift-shop, where merchandise
Will do its part to assuage
This wild lurching between flayed tenderness
And sullen, outletless rage.

Yet would it not be better, somehow, to pass
Straight from the house to the street
And prowl, aggrieved and unappeasable,
Through the Amsterdammers you meet?

*This bearded sophisticate looks like a fascist,
That fit young mom, an informer;
Bystanders and bad Samaritans bike past
A quisling on the corner.*

*Evil winters within us, like a fat black bulb
Some bad spring will split wide
To add its blossom to history's horror garden—
Exactly what Anne denied.*

Uncle Bob Tells a Joke

1.

Around a kitchen table, three men sit
Drinking and talking. A small boy looks on.
Downstairs, their mother lets *Gunsmoke* acquit
Her country of weakness in Vietnam.

Then Bob, youngest and dimmest of the three,
Stubs out his Lucky Strike, ringpulls a beer,
And leans in with a palm on either knee.
His grin alerts them, *This you'll want to hear.*

First he pretends to check if they're alone.
Half the fun is the accent and the face.
The punchline jackpots in a hearty tone
That deftly leagues the four of them by race.

Hoarse guffaws. The wives know to keep away.
From the hall, Grandma shouts *Quiet!* again.
Each minute past bedtime the boy can stay
Affirms his place up here among the men.

In bed at last, he broods over Bob's joke;
Uncles and fathers can't, he knows, be cruel.
So he was eager, soon as he awoke,
To tell everyone—even *them*—at school.

2.

I saw those three less and less. Now they're dead.
Living as though all we shared was a name,
Which should have proved me different, proved instead
Refusal had contoured me just the same.

Like shears that scissor out a silhouette
Across what seems one sameness while together,
We clip the outlines of our temperament
With every commonality we sever.

Unscripted

Jumbled with you in a five-AM embrace,
I lacked words to say, love, how I'd just dreamt
Of coming home one night to find you dead,
And of grief then hunting me through a maze
Of bleached-out, neverending nothingscapes;
But as light through parted curtains revealed
The impatient day outside, I prolonged my hold
As if to prove you mine and not the grave's.

Lovers long married seldom talk of death,
And if they do, only with an awkward air
Suiting scenarios never run through before,
And this is wise: for how should they confess
Waking to know themselves rehearsed to lose
The still-dreaming spouses they clasp so close?