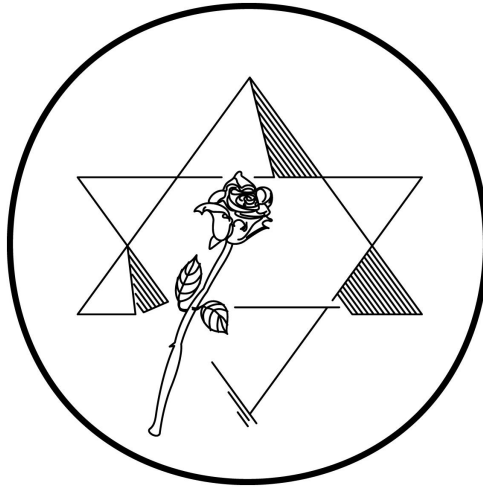


# THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF EARTH



Esther Cameron  
writing as George Richter

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*In memory of my parents  
Eugene and Adrienne Cameron  
who set an example  
in the wise use of the mind*



This little threshing-floor that makes us so fierce

Dante, *Paradiso* XXII

And an earth will climb up to us, our earth,  
this one.

Paul Celan, *The No-One's-Rose*





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## INTRODUCTION

This book began as a response to Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, which was first shown to me in 1982, in a circle that met in Jerusalem to discuss the work of Paul Celan.

Schell's work is mainly concerned with the nuclear peril, but also with the ecological crisis generally. Early on in the book he writes:

Looking at the earth as it is caught in the lens of the camera, reduced to the size of a golf ball, we gain a new sense of scale, and are made aware of a new relation between ourselves and the earth: we can almost imagine that we might hold this earth between the giant thumb and forefinger of one hand. Similarly, as the possessors of nuclear arms we stand outside nature, holding instruments of cosmic power with which we can blot life out, while at the same time we remain embedded in nature and depend on it for our survival.

Throughout much of the first half of the book, especially, Schell struggles to grasp the psychological and spiritual implications of the threat of extinction: "But in imagining extinction we gaze past everything human into a dead time that falls outside the human tenses of past, present, and future." Now, he writes,

the whole species is called on ... to protect our being as an act of will. Formerly, the future was simply given to us; now it must be achieved. We must become the agriculturalists of time. If we do not plant and cultivate the future years of human life, we will never reap them. This effort would constitute a counterpart in our conscious life of reason and will of our instinctual urge to procreate.

Schell posits that "the obligation to save the species" implies "a new relationship among human beings" which he calls "universal parenthood": "The nuclear peril makes all of us, whether we happen to have children of our own or not, the parents of all future generations."

The question Schell begins to ask—what spiritual transformation would have to come over humankind to help us refrain from destroying ourselves and our surroundings—was one I had been raising in the meetings of the Jerusalem Celan-Arbeitskreis, and this was doubtless what prompted the

late Mary Zilzer, a Reader and listener par excellence, to hand me the issues of the *New Yorker* in which *The Fate of the Earth* was first published. Celan, of course, had been an interim survivor of what Schell called “the closest thing to a precursor of the extinction of the species that history contains”—the destruction of European Jewry.

To my disappointment, the third part of Schell’s book turned back toward a more immediate pragmatism, postponing spiritual questions on grounds of political urgency. In response, I began a prose work entitled *The Consciousness of the Earth*. But somehow it did not flow; I was checked at every turn by the sense that what I was saying was logical but at the same time quite implausible. I put the work aside.

A few months later Jerry Glenn, a scholar who was in touch with the Jerusalemer Celan-Arbeitskreis, invited me to write something for an issue on Paul Celan that he was editing. I chose to write about the image of the earth seen from space which appears in Celan’s poetry, especially in the last section of *The No-One’s Rose*.<sup>1</sup> And a few weeks after that I found myself writing:

For many seasons I have sat and pondered  
the omens of this wonder-perilous time,  
and most of all that image all have seen,  
the earth, that cloud-veiled jewel of blue and green...

And so on for 131 lines, which committed me to writing a blank-verse epic on the ecological crisis. After that a sense of having been “dared” held me to the task of gathering information, internalizing it, and giving it poetic form.

Why did this work have to be in verse? I was not really party to the decision, but I can think of reasons.

First, the impulse driving poetry is, to borrow Schell’s language, a “counterpart ... of our instinctual urge to procreate.” Certainly Celan’s poetry makes us feel this, but already Matthew Arnold, in *The Study of Poetry*, connected poetry with “the instinct of self-preservation in humanity.” Therefore poetry is an appropriate idiom for a work concerned with human survival.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Distant Earth: Celan’s Planetary Vision,” *Sulphur* 11, fall 1984. The argument of this essay was later incorporated into my book *Western Art and Jewish Presence in the Poetry of Paul Celan: Roots and Ramifications of the “Meridian” Speech* (Lexington, 2014).

Second, in poetry you do not worry so much about implausibility. The physicist Niels Bohr once dismissed a theory with the comment, "Not crazy enough." In the humanities, poetry is the home of what is crazy enough.

And third, in poetry one can think more coherently than in prose. In a poem things hang together, and this is a great help when one has to synthesize ideas from cosmology, paleontology, sociobiology, sociology, psychology, literature, and religious tradition. Gregory Bateson, in *Toward an Ecology of Mind*, acknowledges poetry as an ideal vehicle of "holistic" thinking; so it is more than ominous that in an age when the need for such thought has been recognized, poetry should have been shunted off onto an aesthetic sidetrack.

And finally, poetry demands concentration; that is why it is hard and why it is necessary. Over the last two hundred years, the inventions of material science have altered the world beyond recognition. Each of these inventions required considerable mental concentration. Many of them, and all taken together, had consequences that were not anticipated, and that have created environmental and social problems. These problems, the solutions to which lie in the field of the social sciences and the humanities, would need to be attacked with equal concentration.

Besides writing in verse, I have also taken the risk of using a conventional, at times somewhat archaic style, which even those who still practice poetry have abandoned. But in *Human Nature* Edward O. Wilson, grappling with the question of whether our sociobiological heritage will allow us to come to grips with our self-created dilemmas, rather abruptly suggests "nobility" as a quality we need to cultivate. Now, the linguistic vehicle of "nobility" is precisely the slightly-elevated, slightly-archaic poetic style which has taken many different inflections, yet somehow remained itself until its recent abandonment. Its quality of "nobility" must have to do with the fact that it is of no particular generation, but belongs to the chain of generations. The modern insistence on contemporaneity and novelty at every minute has a subterranean connection with the throwaway culture, and certainly implies—Schell makes this point, I think—an acceptance of futurelessness. Here I may seem to part company with Celan; but a sense that he had carried modernism *ad absurdum*, driven it, in a sadly literal sense, to its dead end, was part of what prompted me to turn back toward traditionalism.

The reader will often be aware of a struggle to bridge the gap between poetic and scientific language. Scientific language can be exploited for poetic ends only up to a point; you cannot get “deoxyribonucleic acid” to scan in any meter. This linguistic hiatus mirrors the hiatus between scientific and humanistic knowledge. The poet, even one who is also a scientist, cannot write as a scientist but only as a member of the human community, an inhabitant of the world which science has shaped. What could not be translated into the aforesaid standard poetic style, I have had to leave as a blurred outline on the periphery. But this is no bar to the task of finding a human orientation to the universe (see Celan’s Bremen speech) against a background of scientific fact and theory which has shifted many times in the last century and is bound to shift again.

Indeed, some of that shifting has taken place since the first private publication of this poem in 1989. In the early years of this century I made some changes to “update” the poem accordingly, and above all to take into account an increased understanding of the genesis of language. And this, in turn, has enabled me to elaborate the final recommendations a little more, and to give them a more scientifically transparent foundation.

Although these changes do not reach to the basic argument of the poem, still they make us aware that this poem’s situation is not that of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* or Dante’s *Commedia*. Lucretius and Dante described a cosmos in terms that remained plausible for some generations afterward, while their poems settled into the literary landscape as monolithic and permanent features. In our time, certainly, no one can aspire to describe the universe “once for all.”

But this doesn’t mean that the Lucretian/Dantean enterprise of describing the world in poetic terms should be abandoned! Rather, the new developments point up the truth (which I have dwelt on in the essays collected in *A Handbook of Macropoetics*) that literature does not consist only in the production of isolated masterpieces but is, ideally, an ongoing collegial appraisal and reappraisal. And so, the hope of *The Consciousness of Earth* is not to say the last word on the ecological situation but, on the contrary, to model and catalyze an ongoing process of poetical reflection, a discussion of environment and society deepened by the concentration and coherency that are the age-old inheritance of poetry, needed

more than ever if we are to assume our responsibility for the earth.

This poem was first published in 1989 under the pseudonym George Richter, which I have again placed on the title page of this edition. Perhaps one can still think of George Richter as the poem's persona. The name alludes, of course, to George Sand and especially to George Eliot, whose use of the pseudonym seems related to a spirit of objective benevolence which attempts to speak from some fictive observation-point between the genders. Perhaps it was also suggested by Schell's suggestion that we become "the agriculturalists of time"; its root meaning is "farmer" or "earth-worker."

Schell's book gave considerable impetus to protests against nuclear weapons. But in a conversation not long before his death in 2014,<sup>1</sup> Schell "said that, despite arms talks and arsenal reductions, he thought the world had failed to come to grips with the nuclear question." He also said that we have not yet faced up to the prospect of extinction, and that while particular threats are disasters may move us to act, "we intuitively feel that's not the essence of the matter: the essence is more what the religious people say about taking care of creation." The present revision of this work has aimed mainly at sharpening this last point, by discharging a debt to the religious tradition I believe to be closest to this essence.

One thing I hope is that this work may make some contribution to the debate between creationism and mechanism, a debate in which what humans are given to know of the creative process is, curiously, seldom taken into account. I hope this poem will give the reader to sense that process by which poems—and also religious traditions—take shape has some affinities with the process of evolution, which is not described with complete adequacy by the term "natural selection."

Since the first publication of this poem, time has, obviously, not stood still. In particular, the faculties of attention and concentration to which this poem must speak have been further compromised. I can only put in a word here for the recognition that this is the central environmental issue, and for an effort, commensurate with the urgency, to recover such faculties. The reading of this poem must surely be, as was the writing of it, a form of exercise.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Yorker, April 7, 2014,  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/04/07/jonathan-schell>

I wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Jerusalemer Celan-Arbeitskreis—Dr. Israel Chalfen, Manfred Winkler, Mary Zilzer, Magali Zibaso, Dr. Eva Avi-Yonah, all of blessed memory—for the dialogue in which the thoughts expressed here could unfold. Essential inspiration came from Rabbi Dr. Zvi Faier o.b.m., physicist, Talmud scholar and poet in quest of a “unified reality,” who encouraged me to pit consciousness against “fate.” Thanks are also due to Paul Mendes-Flohr and Haim Goldgraber, who recommended me for the Peter Schwiefert Prize, with the help of which part of the poem was written. Dr. Faier, Dr. Avi-Yonah, Rabbi Shabtai Teicher o.b.m, Frederick Leibowitz, Hadassah Haskale, Joseef Vleeschhouwer, Ilana Coven Attia, and Rabbi Avraham Sutton, the first circle of the poem’s readers, gave me the invaluable assurance that the poem is readable; Ilana Coven Attia published a version of Chapter 8 in *B’Or HaTorah*; Chapter 1 appeared in *Spindrifter*. I am grateful, also, to Robert Ward, who published an installment version in *The Bellowing Ark*, and to Joe M. Ruggier of Multicultural Books, where the poem’s third edition appeared. To my parents, Eugene and Adrienne Cameron o.b.m., whose moral and material support has sustained this lengthy quest, I owe more than can be expressed.

November, 2016  
Maale Adumim



## Chapter 1

*The image of Earth seen from space, a symbol of the fragility of the natural world. The ecological crisis as result of human nature. The question whether human nature has resources to meet the crisis, perhaps with the help of powers beyond the human. The imperative to take a distance from the human condition, and to gather and sum up our knowledge about it, in hopes of a "consciousness of earth" that would be the union of science and spiritual intuition. Metric verse as the proper tool for this task.*

For many seasons I have sat and pondered  
the omens of this wonder-perilous time,  
and most of all that image all have seen:  
that globe, that cloud-veiled jewel of blue and green  
upon the black and lifeless infinite,  
caught in our far-sent instrumental eye.  
This is that earth our ancestors called Great  
and Mother, upon which they poured their offerings  
of wine, the blood of sacrificial victims,                     10  
imploping sustenance of her large bounty,  
into whose lap with song and prayer they sowed  
the seed of harvests and the lifeless bodies  
of those they mourned or hated; in whose depths  
their fearful hope conjectured dim dominions,  
the retreat of spirits banished from the light,  
whose distant regions were the vacant canvas  
for wild conjectures, now by fact effaced —  
the Earth, which yielded us at last the metals,  
the fuels, to thrust ourselves beyond its grip  
to where it now appears to us, so small,                     20  
as if it fit a thumb and finger's compass.  
We gaze on this and know it is a mirror  
that shows our power and our alienness;  
we read in this, as in a face, the fear  
of all the devastation we can do  
— we, who have not created yet one grassblade  
of all that give the earthlight its green shimmer! —  
and at the same time here we are, caught up,  
as ever, in the illimitable web  
woven by life, sustaining us and all,                     30  
and if we tear that from the earth, we perish.

We know, too, that this sight, these meditations,  
come to impart not first, but final warning;  
yet, like a blinded tragic hero dreamed  
by some uneasy poet among the Greeks –  
that race whose thought, waking from nature's sleep,  
began the calculations which have led  
with an inevitable and quickening pace  
to these our present straits – pursue our course.  
Our madness is methodical and armed: 40  
it borrows for its all-destructive purpose  
the scientist's brain, the manufacturer's greed,  
the statesman's guile, the hates of creeds and nations;  
our better reason, conscious of its ties  
to all that lives, the partner of compassion,  
whose inmost deep gleams with an intuition  
of an eternal Being that desires  
the life of our small world, and not its death,  
sits feeble and disarmed in warring hearts,  
confused with much that militates against it, 50  
so that its scattered enterprises seem  
like the last twitchings of a dying body,  
and it prepares itself to be a nothing,  
or if the spirit survives, to be a ghost  
wandering the ruins of a lifeless planet.  
It knows: not all the heavens man has dreamed  
could compensate it for this world of matter  
in which it hoped to be incorporate.

So much this eye has seen, this heart has heard,  
with every eye and heart that wakes and fears 60  
and scans the mind's field for some word or action,  
groping with partial knowledge, partial light.  
The greater mind that sees through all at once,  
that sees the pattern from above, discerns  
the path that leads out of the death-locked maze,  
is not yet with us, and may never be;  
and yet there is this impulse, this command  
to try and think as if one were that mind,  
thrust out from all particular entanglings  
and viewing human life as it were whole. 70  
Now, while the hand still grips the pen, the mind  
has strength to sort the tangled skeins of thought,  
I will attempt it: render my account,

though flawed and partial only, of the world,  
 all that I know of nature's laws, the laws  
 that shaped the human heart such that it seems  
 to war against the earth's and its own life;  
 and then what sources in it, or beyond,  
 still flow with wisdom and the encouragement  
 to harbor, even now, a hope of turning, 80  
 of some discovery or revelation  
 to free it from itself, and give it peace –  
 a wakeful peace. I seem to see from far  
 how it might be that, warned by a self-knowledge  
 exact as knowledge of the atom is  
 and nourished by a final recognition  
 of what is ours, and yet not wholly ours –  
 seen not by outward gaze, but through our being –  
 we could at last distinguish good from ill  
 and, even while accepting death, choose life. 90  
 This we would call the Consciousness of Earth:  
 an outward knowledge, bent upon that object  
 of which we are a part, articulate;  
 an inward knowledge, flowing from our oneness  
 with all that is, and with that deeper Inward  
 by which alone Creation is sustained:  
 these two in One, a constant interaction  
 in an awareness not to be divided,  
 a common mind through which Creation thinks  
 thoughts self-deception shall not mar again, 100  
 and which may rule, as the brain rules the limbs,  
 the diverse forces of its myriad will.

And you, who turn these pages: do not wonder  
 that to the present urgency I speak  
 in measures molded by a quieter time,  
 that I compel my thoughts to keep this pace  
 which seems to check and trammel their unfolding.  
 Know, reader, what the elder poets knew  
 and what the distant disk of Earth now tells us:  
 that all things have their limit and their term 110  
 and in that term and limit is their form,  
 their beauty, and the laws which give them life,  
 shaping the energy which otherwise  
 would lose itself in boundless dissipation.  
 It is by this that they are what they are,

it is by this that they are part of all.

Who would not know the end can never know  
the whole; but, knowing it, one's thoughts cohere,  
memory and anticipation speak  
through every present line, and form the ear 120  
to catch, the understanding to retain,  
the eye to recognize the thing, when met,  
of which the word had spoken.

Thus the laws  
of ancient times were handed down in verse  
before we learned to trust the hand too much,  
and the brain instrumental to the hand.  
Bear, then, with me and with this simple measure,  
the step of a pedestrian on earth's ways.  
So without haste, trusting our strength as far  
as it may go, and the divining thread 130  
of our own consciousness, we now set forth.

## Chapter 2

*Interrogation of the natural universe; the necessity of understanding the outward conditions of our existence, whatever the belief about our ultimate origins and destiny. Recognition of the limits of ordinary language for this purpose. Origins of the universe, the solar system and the earth.*

Those principles that frame the world of matter,  
the origins of that enormous fact  
from which earth's being and our own has budded,  
the mind asks first to know; for in those laws  
the conditions of our lease upon this earth  
must be inscribed, that history must hold  
some intimation of our purpose here.  
We may not hold those laws inflexible—  
may think, through sacred text or our own eyes,  
to have seen clear evidence of their suspension       10  
by spiritual force, as if some Other  
behind the known world wanted to remind us  
that they are nothing more than its decrees,  
or as if human thought could sometimes enter  
dimensions where causality is void.  
Yet always the miraculous moment passes  
and things resume their course. The prophet dies,  
the wizard leaves the city, and tomorrow  
their exploits will be told to doubting ears.  
If to the Source beyond the source all humans       20  
could turn with one unclouded recognition,  
then we might see the bonds of time and space  
transformed for good; but meanwhile we must reckon  
with the material world such as it is,  
where not to wish to know these shaping laws  
is not to wish to know the Will that gave them:  
Necessity, the darker face of God.  
From kindred need did our most ancient kin  
collect a lore of herb and beast and weather  
and tell themselves how spirit shaped all this       30  
as they shaped stone and wood to their own uses,  
seeking to know the will that rules the world  
and strike with it a bargain for survival.  
Only the scene has shifted. Not some range  
of beach or upland, forest or savannah,

where every tree and stone is known and named,  
but all the earth, which none can know alone,  
all of those tilting overflown horizons  
effaced by height, inhabited by strangers  
whose knowledge we must have to make earth whole, 40  
in more harmonious union to rewed  
*adam* with *adamah*, *homo* with *humus*;  
and strange, too, is the knowledge, stranger far  
than hunters' tales to those who stayed in camp.  
How can we follow all the eyes that scan  
the fleeing stars, peer to the atom's depth,  
seeing that our sense is molded to dimensions  
between the microscopic and the vast,  
the small Euclidean universe of feeling...?  
Our language, too, is of that middle world 50  
and cleaves with all its meanings to those objects  
the instruments gaze past and through, the fugue  
of symbols whirls away from, into spaces  
only accessible to minds detached  
from reference, from time and space, from being.  
So even the discoverers, returning  
into the room of common talk, begin  
to stammer, when they tell us what they saw,  
till what the common understanding gathers  
becomes a kind of legend, pieced together 60  
from a word here and a word there that seemed  
intelligible, because metaphor,  
husk of a fruit the palate cannot taste.

In the beginning, so we heard, there was  
nothing. No form of space, no thread of time,  
only a point so tiny and condensed  
that all was in it, yet it was nowhere.  
Till by some unimaginable decision  
it blossomed forth into the void, became  
matter and energy, in space and time. 70  
Space was but where IT was, time the succession  
of its states, none like that which came before,  
matter and energy its alternate selves,  
each one convertible into the other,  
the sum of matter and energy forever  
the same, and equal to that primal nothing  
which once was all. This was the first decree;

the second was, that though the sum of these  
 remains the same, yet in their disposition  
 they always move toward dissolution: dense 80  
 must become rarer, what is hot must cool,  
 all that is ordered to disorder tending,  
 till the compressed fires of the origin  
 become at last an even distribution  
 of particles too fine to be reduced  
 or heat too faint to act on anything  
 and nothing left distinct for it to act on.  
 If time is what it was, what it will be,  
 the measure of its passage that dispersion  
 our present minds call entropy, then such 90  
 was the beginning, such must be the end.  
 All things are but the intermediate states  
 between the primal and the final Nothing,  
 eddies in the unresting outward motion  
 where entropy now locally decreases,  
 so that the forces in some finite space  
 are concentrated, giving rise to order,  
 but always purchased with a greater price  
 of a disorder and a scattering elsewhere.  
 Thus in the rarefaction of the All 100  
 amid the empty spaces fiery clouds,  
 condensing, separating, form to stars,  
 and matter torn from stars, or cooled and hardened  
 from those same clouds, becomes the circling planets,  
 the traveling swarms of shards, the peregrine comets,  
 the clots of cosmic dust that block our view  
 into the center of the galaxy.  
 Our sun, like other stars, once flung together,  
 burns itself, huge and finite as its lifetime,  
 in a tremendous radiant dissipation 110  
 of light and heat that scatter in the cosmos  
 like a match struck in a vast empty hall,  
 except that tiny fraction which encounters  
 the planets' mass, that holds it and is warmed.  
 Among these Earth, with fostering air and seas,  
 conceives it in elaborating forms,  
 and life arises in the sun's decline.

The human being, waking on this planet,  
 is like a child born to an ancient house:

it does not guess, at first, how others stood 120  
 at these same windows where it climbs to gaze,  
 what footsteps hollowed out the stair, whose face  
 peered from the mirrors that now hold its own.  
 The child's world is no older than the child.  
 It does not dream the house without its presence,  
 still less the ancestral ground without the house,  
 and least of all that here was mountain ridge  
 or glacial valley, bog or ocean floor.  
 To our young eyes the hills seemed everlasting,  
 coeval and coterminous with the stars; 130  
 at most we marked the patient work of rivers  
 changing their beds, the deepening meander  
 cut through at last, resolving into rapids,  
 leaving behind the oxbow's stagnant crescent.  
 If the ground shook sometimes, we also trembled,  
 not for our lives alone, but for the order  
 of things, as if some god had broken faith!  
 Yet all these things denote the work of earth,  
 the last slow stages of its transformation.  
 They say it aggregated first from fragments 140  
 that grazed and clung like snowflakes in a storm;  
 their energy of motion as they struck  
 transformed to heat and melted them together,  
 so that the earth took shape, a molten globe.  
 The solar system settled. Of its matter  
 planets and sun were formed, the interspace  
 was empty, and the rain of fragments ended  
 (save for the visits of the Perseids,  
 the rare, belated shard of ancient iron  
 hurled burning into earth, for a reminder). 150  
 The core was formed of iron, molten still;  
 above lay rocks whose mass had made them plastic  
 (for any substance, heaped upon itself,  
 though hard, will bend of its own weight at last);  
 in these be radioactive elements  
 that work their way by melting toward the surface.  
 Through geologic time, by slow convection,  
 a stream of stone that inches year by year,  
 those elements and that primordial heat  
 rise to be decomposed and dissipated 160  
 upon the surface. It is this convection  
 that shifts the continents, makes spurt volcanos



from level ground, and draws down ocean floor  
to fill with sediments which, ages hence,  
the snow-cap of a mountain peak will cover.  
While earth-rotation drives the mill of the winds  
(itself a remnant of the cosmic whirlwind),  
rains slowly wash the peaks into the valleys,  
groping in widening channels toward the seas  
from which they rose as mist awhile ago. 170

Thus as the forces of the origin,  
hidden beneath the surface, go on working,  
earth's hoard of gems and metals is exposed,  
the soils are formed in which our life takes root.  
Slow is the work of Earth, and long must be  
our thoughts if we would seek to travel with it  
until the mill shall turn no more, earth's spinning  
brought to a standstill by the pauseless friction  
of wind and time, of almost empty space;  
till, cold within, the ground shall heave no more, 180  
and, the last ocean filled, the last peak levelled,  
a shallow brackish water cover all;  
till the sun grow too faint to nourish life,  
or, a red giant, swallow it in fire.  
Till then our kind might live—a life so long,  
our heretofore would be the sapling ring  
within the trunk of an immense sequoia,  
had we but wisdom equal to our knowledge.

### Chapter 3

*Further meditations on the challenge to human consciousness posed by science. The need for consciousness to feel grounded in the universe, rather than see itself as a mere chance result of mindless processes. The question of intentionality and meaning in the universe; a tentative response.*

Wisdom: that word sits oddly on our tongue.  
It seems a sound expired, a curious image  
the faith that made it animates no longer.  
Whoever would restore that word to life,  
they must respin the thread of soul that fastened  
the creatural breath and heartbeat to the stars,  
the present to a time beyond all time,  
now that the painted walls of myth are down  
that hid the limitless domain of distance,  
the stellar generations and the light-years 10  
voiceless, untraversed by a sensate step,  
and in the merest dust-grain gapes the abyss  
of infinitesimal mechanism.

True,  
we were in our own eyes, from our beginnings,  
a consciousness, a waking light of thought  
amid the shadows of unknowing matter  
(though the light fluttered from material wick!),  
but we construed all matter as a mask  
for something mindful, like ourselves, that chose 20  
to hide, and speak in code. We set ourselves  
to learn its language, stammered: sacrifice,  
dreams, prophecies. Mind bent upon the world  
heard in the night a voice that called its name,  
saw letters of white fire and strained to read  
their messages aright, and still was straining,  
when came that way of thinking we call science  
where observation rules the mind alone,  
with calculation as its minister,  
spirit and heart excluded from the council  
lest they rebel against the resolution 30  
no longer to commune with something hidden  
behind the solid world's impassive mask  
but to take Nature as its own machine,  
a sequence of predictable effects

explainable without ulterior purpose  
 and, through such knowledge, subject to control.  
 And now the prophecies come true, the wonders  
 are worked indeed, the several tales converge  
 toward a consistent picture of the world.  
 Only it seems a world where heart and spirit                   40  
 are mere illusions, mind itself a shimmer  
 in the synapses' evanescent web,  
 an orphan from the hour of its conception  
 in the indifferent womb of the unliving,  
 where what is least alive endures the longest:  
 hydrogen atoms and great galaxies,  
 even they to be extinguished or unlinked  
 in entropy's aeonian decline,  
 unless renewed in endless repetition,  
 as some have thought and may yet think again               50  
 with some new twist of numbers in mind-space.  
 It little matters to our mortal sense  
 whether once only from its fiery bulb  
 the universe unfolded and unfolds  
 forever into the expanding void  
 till all is dark, and lifeless planets circle  
 their burnt-out suns still fleeing one another  
 at distances unmeasured by a ray,  
 or whether all the outward-fleeing fragments,  
 feeling the mutual pull of mass, might finally               60  
 slow, stop, contract themselves into the dense  
 singular source that once again would shatter,  
 fling forth new clouds of hydrogen that swirl  
 to stars again, and fuse within their core  
 the heavier elements until exhausted  
 they fold upon themselves and then explode,  
 leaving to stars of second generation  
 the stuff of planets, whereon life perchance  
 would start once more the arduous ascent  
 after the shutting of the human eye.                               70  
 And likewise little would our natures notice  
 whether this universe, of which we see  
 only that patch (perhaps a mere detail  
 of its vast canvas) which the courier Light  
 traverses in some fifteen billion years —  
 whether this universe be all there is  
 or one of many, many more than many,

immensity raised to immenser powers!  
Inane in their ungraspable dimensions  
these things appear to anxious living creatures 80  
that haggle with the elements for a span  
which to the stellar pulse is as the blink  
of an electron to the mortal day;  
while at its vigil in the mindless All  
the mind encompasses its own cessation,  
transcending its ephemeral solitude  
toward what, being lifeless, cannot suffer death.  
As it is said that to a freezing man  
the snow at last seems warm, so the mind glides  
toward an indifference to human ends— 90  
through mind itself the void reclaims its own!

Yet spirit—be it merely mortal breath  
or mist of something greater on the glass  
of temporal being—shakes us from that drowse,  
bidding us seek on those unfolding pages  
of time and space, the signature of Mind,  
pleading our consciousness no happenstance  
in a concatenation of collisions,  
but primally-envisioned end of all.  
Were not the plans of earth and sea and sky 100  
drawn up before the universe was hatched,  
how from that mass of fire-consuming fire  
came even an atom, came the nuclear force  
that binds the protons in against their charge?  
How were the outward fling, the backward pull  
so balanced that the galaxies took shape  
in place of mere diffusion or collapse,  
with stars not all diffuse and swiftly-burning  
or dense and dim, but some long-lived and bright  
enough to give life's process light and time? 110  
How settled out of incandescent sameness  
the properties of carbon, whose four arms  
reach out and hold in endless catenation  
the substances that form the living cell?  
Was the decree cast in that fiery furnace  
that water, solvent catalytic medium  
of transformation, should expand when freezing  
that ice might shield aquatic life in winter  
and yield in spring to the returning sun?

A different calibration of the constants, 120  
 and universes without form or life  
 are conjured up, though they could not be known  
 for lack of any knowers they might foster,  
 and their conception too is ours alone.  
 And even if indeed all combinations  
 eventuate, all worlds are realized  
 in wherewhens wholly other than our own,  
 beyond the reach of any courier  
 save mathematical imagination —  
 our universe one dot within a matrix 130  
 of automatic variation, like  
 the Shakespeare sonnet tapped out by one monkey  
 among a billion billion billion monkeys  
 typing, or merely playing with the keys  
 (this seems unfalsifiable conjecture,  
 such as Religions are accused of floating) —  
*this* universe is such that we are here.  
 Its overwhelming structure yet implies  
 our little niche, the stair of magnitude  
 on which we live and move and have our being 140  
 and ask our questions, find or make our meanings,  
 and can still, stunning though the revelation  
 of all this vast duration and extent  
 be to the mind and soul, decline to measure  
 our meaning by the length of time or space.  
 For if indeed all blossomed from a point  
 tinier than anything our eyes now see  
 or instruments image; if in times as brief  
 as the world's Aleph was minute, the laws  
 of energy and matter were laid down, 150  
 first courses of the cosmic edifice;  
 then we may note, conversely, that within  
 the globe one human cranium encases  
 more multifarious events occur  
 than in the inflated future nothingness  
 which one blank formula might circumscribe.  
 Our action is not lessened if we know  
 how vast an amphitheater we play to,  
 though from the seats tiered to infinity  
 no watcher may applaud.

Nothing has changed, 160  
 or only metaphors. Although the earth

circles a sun that spins upon a wheel  
of stars and dust round nothingness flung spinning  
out of exploding nothing, we are still  
the vessel that takes shape upon that wheel,  
the fulcrum of the tiny and the vast,  
the point where fates of matter become action  
and open into thought.

Nor are we simply  
a product of the laws that set the force  
of gravity, the tension in the atom, 170  
devised the alphabet of particle  
and quark, spelled out the elements, composed  
the phrases of the molecule, the stanzas  
and cantos of the chromosomes. The laws  
of chemistry could not have been predicted  
from physics, nor from inorganic forms  
the laws of living things; the rules of grammar  
do not imply, again, the Shakespeare sonnet  
of which they are foundation, but not cause.  
May we believe the wholeness of the creature, 180  
that all-at-once of dawning form that pleads  
for mind anterior to brain, for laws  
not first laid down within the molten seed  
of the universe, nor in the cores of stars,  
nor in the cell's fortified water-drop,  
nor on the abacus of DNA,  
nor even in the choreography  
of animal behavior...? At each level  
of ordering, new laws are manifest,  
not cancelling, but building on the known, 190  
perhaps even toward that freedom we divine  
at moments of religious intuition:  
we have as much grounds as we ever had  
to think ourselves the point of Time's display.

Then, too, this solid-looming world of matter,  
to those who probe most deeply, seems to fade,  
thin out, and dissipate into a dance  
of nothing around nothing: proton circled  
by an electron, presence without place,  
fractions dissolving into smaller fractions, 200  
particles flickering in and out of being,  
twin particles that, separated, act

in unison, as from a placeless joining:  
the causal laws no more an iron chain  
but rather tendencies of aggregates  
of things that could be one way or another,  
whose ultimate particular event  
is indeterminate, left up to chance,  
as though in the interstices of law  
a legislating will had left itself  
some room for future action. 210

So we lay  
the jackstraws of our little information  
in patterns that give comfort to our hope.  
And straightway from the side a whisper comes,  
again, of miracles, of messages  
from mind to mind without material sign,  
of dice a gambler's concentration loads,  
of psychic force that deigns to show its hand  
beneath the laboratory's sterile light.  
In eager throng around these findings grope 220  
the imaginations of our self-deceit,  
ready to spin their webs across the gulf  
that still divides perception and desire,  
the fortune-teller's question and the weft  
of cosmic circumstance whereon as yet  
no human name or destiny appears.

And when we have retraced the gradual journey  
from the first jot of inarticulate life  
to life's now visible and vast array,  
will then such name and destiny appear? 230  
When we have contemplated how mutation  
produced, the sieve of natural selection  
sorted the forms, by seeming accident  
widening bit by bit the creature's bounds —  
was there intent beyond the sunlight's pulse  
to gauge and call it good?

We cannot see  
the mark of hands; yet from the atom's cave,  
where Fixed and Indeterminate dwell together,  
comes no denial; for the undetermined  
may be the even dice, the hairbreadth scale 240  
sentitive to the breath of shaping Will  
or questing need in creatural straits. If all

that lives and dies is but a spelling-out  
of a molecular message, this may be.  
The creature shapes and shapes itself again  
to seek its food and choose its mate and send  
the message on, another generation,  
and to run up against its limitations  
blindly as waves against the solid rock  
that never seems to yield, and yet some thread 250  
of water enters, and the rock is breached.  
Not chance alone, but Possibility,  
responding to Necessity as challenge,  
summoned Invention forth, as from the trance  
of workmanship design evokes design,  
through the mind-wearying ages that revolved  
in evolution's progress: were they more  
than the spinning of a potter's wheel? And when  
we pace the shore and hear with restless yearning  
the beating of the breakers upon stone: 260  
are we the yearners, exiled from the home  
of the unknowing? Or is it not the sea  
that yearns in us, surging against the chains  
of matter toward still-unenvisioned being?



## Chapter 4

*Origins and history of life; constitution of Earth's ecosystem.*

Contracted to a tale of seven days,  
creation served our forbears as a backdrop  
for human deeds measured in generations  
the scroll of bardic memory could record.  
Holding in awe the power that made the world,  
they sensed its presence in the human present  
and took things as the instantaneous flash  
of waking human consciousness – inspired,  
they heard, by greater consciousness – revealed them:  
creatures like figures from a sculptor's hand, 10  
meant to be so and constant in design;  
although the wisest spoke among themselves  
of many worlds before this world contrived  
and broken in the workshop of the Maker.  
Then stirred in us the power of invention  
that had been born half drowsed, responding slowly  
to need's demand till more imperious need  
called forth its utmost effort. All our thought  
was bent now on contrivance, on the stages 20  
that lead from one appearance to the next,  
and from that bent we questioned what we saw.  
The earth gave forth its answers. Every stone  
bore hieroglyphs that told its generations  
of metamorphosis and deposition  
from lava core to river-beach and basin  
to new-uplifted mountain cliff and glacier,  
from rock to sand and silt and back again.  
The strata – buckled, tilted – were the pages,  
printed with many an eldritch character 30  
of ancient life, that spelled a chronicle  
to dwarf the flickering breath we read it by;  
in mines, on mountain scarps, in river-gorges  
the evidence was gathered, pieced together,  
proportion from a single femur conjured  
the prehistoric beast with all its limbs  
and sinews, while the microscope conducted  
eye's mind into the realm of the minute  
to read the cryptograms enciphered there.  
The human mind upon creation's trail

seemed equal to all subtleties devised 40  
by time and cosmic forces in their working  
without a thought toward one end or another;  
it wandered, hearing no voice but its own  
telling the tale of untold time and naming  
the dreamless dead of days before the word.

Yet marvelous, after all, this story sounded  
to one who heard it in a parent's voice  
opening realms of time where human mind  
henceforth must make its home. So let it be.  
The geologic column call a shadow 50  
cast by a thought more mighty than we knew,  
let all along the length of that thought play  
creatures called from oblivion by our naming.  
Done cannot be undone, nor known unknown,  
but we can speak it to ourselves again  
until the macrocosmic time of makings  
beat with our pulse, until the tides of song  
smooth the sharp stones of knowing, and the hush  
of earth's slow breathing steal into our own;  
till we have got our origins by heart 60  
again, and in the present bustle stands  
awareness timed to mountain revolutions.

From the first jot of inarticulate life  
to its now visible and vast array  
the gradual aeonian road extends,  
braided of many wanderings, like the trail  
our waggoned pioneers broke through the desert  
toward the western ocean: broad to all horizons,  
to all appearance aimless, yet impelled;  
and in retracing it, our theories too 70  
crisscross, combine and recombine, evolve  
and supersede themselves. For a beginning,  
conjecture working back through time evokes  
the chaotic earth, cooled from that storm of stone  
so that its veil of vapor fell as rain  
till seas filled up its hollows, and the sun  
stood for the first time in an earthly sky  
and streamed within the seas and warmed and stirred  
atoms and molecules to intenser motion.  
And the way swiftly-churning water runs 80

in patterns that hold steady while the substance  
 that swells them slips away and is replaced:  
 so, we surmise, that energy of light  
 created standing forms of interaction,  
 a chemical exchange urged on, reined in  
 to restlessly-elaborating structures  
 unknown among the vast and simple stars.  
 – Unless it was indeed among the stars,  
 in cosmic dust between the galaxies, 90  
 in towers reared from vents in ocean floor,  
 or in the chinks of earth's infernal rocks  
 where to this day archaic airless forms  
 live on, that life's first soundless word was spoken,  
 that in the molecular shuffle carbon bonds  
 held and were forged to chains of many links,  
 the polymers, until it chanced that one  
 took from another to comprise its twin,  
 and these unclasped to clasp yet further substance  
 into the likeness of themselves. To these  
 the protein enzymes were associated  
 that make from what the ambient source provides 100  
 whatever is required for replication,  
 and round them the protective membrane formed,  
 dividing when the pattern was repeated.  
 Unless it was that in its own beginning –  
 unique as the first act of replication –  
 a cell-like pattern formed, a unity  
 of membrane separating Self and Other,  
 maintained by primitive metabolism,  
 though empty still of the genetic core  
 which then arrived as parasite, dissolving, 110  
 until it found one membrane that persisted  
 as form around the replicating pattern.  
 Metabolism thus wed replication –  
 the whole that tends and struggles to maintain  
 itself, the seed designed to make its likeness –  
 and so the long relay of life began,  
 as replication led to variation,  
 mistakes in copying carried on, compounded,  
 each accidental small advantage saved  
 from myriads of fast-dissolving failures 120  
 persisted and was added to another,  
 and living forms evolved accordingly,

through ages deeper far than breath can fathom.

Thrice longer than articulate life records  
beat the Archaean seas against the shores  
of shifting continents, while in the shallows  
evolved unseen the scarcely-animate things,  
feeding upon the organic molecules  
with which the seas were filled beneath the sun,  
and then, as these were used, perforce devising 130  
methods of synthesis at more removes,  
elaboration compensating dearth.

Cells entered into other cells, became  
their minute organs, replicating still  
by their own code, as still they do today,  
within the household of the host whose plan  
is wound within the nuclear chromosomes.  
And thus for centuries of million-years  
the micro-organisms bred and fed, 140  
leaving faint traces in the roots of mountains  
upheaved from ocean floor, then worn away  
before the first limb scuttled over ground.

These casings, microscopic rods and spheres;  
this layered pommel of stromatolite,  
the work of massed bacterial generations;  
this film of hardened carbon residue  
wrung, metamorphosed out of recognition  
by subsequent contortions of the rocks –  
these in themselves would not suffice to fill 150  
with characters of history the blank pages  
that make the first three-quarters of earth's tome.

It is the cell itself, the living cell  
unravelling like the puzzle of the rocks,  
that shows what must have been, for this to be.  
As linguists pondering ten separate tongues  
can reconstruct from metamorphosed sounds  
the language that was parent to them all,  
establishing the sequence and the dates  
of severance from the common understanding,  
so the elaborate central code that carries 160  
the message of our being, tells life's readers  
sequence and parentage of living forms;  
and the first, simplest cell, procaryote,  
still lives to tell the origin of all.

Not as a tenant to a house completed  
came life to earth and its enfolding air,  
but raised itself the roof-beam, if aright  
these scholars have rewound the thread of time.  
The atmosphere which pressed those early tides  
was not the air in which we draw our breath; 170  
for oxygen, the sharp, the quick-combining,  
the consort of combustion and of rust,  
was bound with other elements in water  
and in the surface rocks which like a foam  
ride the dark masses of the planet's core,  
while that primordial lightest element  
whose atoms, over time, slip from earth's grasp,  
was more abundant, with its gaseous compounds,  
ammonia and methane, which still burns  
above the marshy ground where ancient things 180  
that cannot breathe our present air, live on.  
Through those enveloping substances beat down  
the sun's intensive ultraviolet rays,  
breaking the new-forged links of life, confining  
its creatures to the dark of earth, or twilight  
of underwater realms. Till in some shallows,  
perhaps, where life was touched by softer beams,  
the ever-rolling dice of life's invention  
cast up a cell that caught the light and used  
light's energy to break and recombine 190  
sea-water's simple compounds for its food.  
This process freed the avid oxygen  
from its old bonds. Now its diffusing atoms  
sought new alliances, disturbing those  
that constituted life's minute design,  
killing some kinds, driving some down and back  
to lightless crevices, but spurring others  
to find the means to shield themselves, or even  
to capture oxygen's corrosive power,  
fueling a quicker life that then discards 200  
as waste, carbon dioxide, which the cells  
that capture light absorb and put to use.  
So with the closing of that ring were founded  
the twin-born indis severable kingdoms  
of photosynthesis and respiration,  
the circulation of earth's single body.

At last the excess of oxygen rose up  
above the stratosphere, encountering  
the ultraviolet rays, beneath whose force  
its atoms split, then half combined with whole, 210  
and this new form of oxygen, the ozone,  
blocked out the rays that forged it. In the sea  
the Phanerozoic era had begun:  
elaborate cells were joined to other cells  
and, differentiating, brought to birth  
the realm of visible and complex life.  
Now life emerged to make the land its home  
under the sheltering membrane of the sky.

How long the new-formed earth lay desolate  
after it cooled, until the spore of life 220  
formed or arrived; how long till it devised  
the self-enclosed and fissionable cell;  
how long until the cell took in its neighbors,  
became a little city in the unseen:  
this laying-down of life's minute foundations  
we trace in thought more than in evidence,  
so slow and unobtrusively it went.  
But when two cells, dividing, did not part  
but clung and metamorphosed to divide  
the labors of existence, then the pulse 230  
of evolution leaped. The transcendental  
eyes (if such there be) that watch through ages  
saw of a macrocosmic sudden start  
a carnival of swiftly-changing shapes;  
and we, in looking back, can almost grasp  
the temporality of ancient strata  
marked, measured by the unfolding of life's forms.  
The deepened crenellation of a lobe,  
the opening or sealing of an eye,  
tell, like the sands heaped in the lower glass, 240  
the turning of a thousand thousand years  
when out of repetition, repetition  
and repetition, variation leaped,  
fell back into the drone of repetition  
monotonous as the hum of summer days  
in vacant lots, when under sun-dried stalks  
the unwearying locust plies his instrument.  
So beneath Cambrian seas the trilobite

scuttled and fed, molted, developed spines,  
 reduced its segments in the Ordovician, 250  
 tended to blindness; in Silurian shallows  
 the jawless fishes ranged; the lichens crept  
 ashore, an arthropod essayed the air;  
 in the Devonian came the first jawed fish,  
 the plated arthrodires, and vascular plants  
 that grew to forests, left the massive silicate  
 columns of Callixylon, first of trees;  
 from inland lakes the lunged fish raised their heads  
 till from a shrinking pool at summer's drought  
 lungs that had learned to gasp the gaseous dryness 260  
 and fins that had become ungainly limbs  
 heaved themselves up on land in search of water  
 and journeys lengthened into residence,  
 although in water still their seed combined.  
 Then came the Age of Coal. Seed-fern and club-moss  
 rose in great forests on the marshy land,  
 fell, and their carbon sank and was compacted  
 beneath the weight of silt and sand and limestone,  
 the slowly-settling sediments; meanwhile  
 amphibious bodies formed themselves to fashion 270  
 a membraned globe, a lime-cemented shell,  
 to hold the mothering fluid for their seed.  
 Now reptiles grown, they parted from the shore  
 and spread inland, amid the drier forests  
 to which the rocks of Permian times bear witness:  
 gingko and conifer, the gymnosperms.  
 Then came upon the garden a great pruning,  
 the greatest, not the last and not the first,  
 bringing a curtain of extinction down  
 on that Act One of earthly life we name 280  
 the Paleozoic. When the seas grew warm  
 and thronged again, the trilobites were gone.  
 In Mesozoic seas the ammonites  
 evolved, convolved the patterns of their sutures,  
 coiled and uncoiled their shells; on land the reptiles  
 proliferated, differentiated;  
 the dinosaurs arose, both great and small.  
 Triassic and Jurassic and Cretaceous  
 wore as a mountain wears, one grain a day,  
 while they held sway on land, and in the sea 290  
 hunted the plesiosaurs, their giant cousins.

From shoreline cliffs the pterosaurs launched out,  
 the sun upon their widestretched glider-wings,  
 to plunge for fish; in some Jurassic forest  
 flapped Archaeopteryx from branch to branch  
 in the first of all plumage, heavy-boned  
 harbinger of the light warm-blooded birds;  
 and large and heavy-boned, a wingless loon,  
 swam Hesperornis, first of waterfowl.

Among the multifarious dinosaurs 300  
 customs of parenthood made their appearance,  
 the young no longer left to hatch at random  
 and seek their forage, but close-kept and fed,  
 while inconspicuous within their world  
 the ancestral mammal brooded, grew alert,  
 its fur without and thermostat within  
 held warmth to keep its senses at their vigil—  
 it opened in its flesh the source of nurture,  
 folded its offspring in a pouch the ages  
 wrought to a chamber of unfolding life. 310  
 And while the floating motes, the nannoplankton,  
 let sift their microscopic carapaces,  
 perhaps a millimeter in a decade,  
 on beds that rose as Dover's great white brow,  
 plants of protected and provisioned seed,  
 willow and fig, magnolia, poplar, plane-tree,  
 the flowering angiosperms, took root and spread,  
 and with them grew the realm of insect-kind  
 that helped and thrive upon their propagation.

But now once more the rows of life were thinned 320  
 in the latest of the great extinctions caused  
 by accidents of planetary scale  
 before the mental mushroom flowered up.  
 There came (as now time's record is replayed)  
 a meteor-bolt that plunged into the planet  
 with huge upheaval scattering far and wide  
 fragments of rock, and in the upper air  
 spreading a cloak of dust. There came a winter's  
 age. The last lines of the ammonites  
 withered from the seas, the dinosaurs 330  
 left on the darkened land their final bones.  
 And when that lifted dust returned to earth,  
 letting a gradual dawn and spring return,  
 the Mesozoic chapter had concluded,



the era of familiar things begun.  
 Earth has preserved alive only the remnant  
 of many a strain that flourished for durations  
 we can no more imagine than the distance  
 between our doorstep and the nearest star:  
 the horseshoe crab recalls the trilobites, 340  
 the single pearly nautilus remains  
 of all the shipwrecked ammonitic fleet,  
 the crocodile, last of the archosaurs,  
 still threatens from the tropic rivers; ginkgo,  
 caught from extinction's brink by human hands,  
 forgets the woods in ornamental gardens  
 or stands the smoky air of city streets.  
 But what was lost is more than compensated  
 by the diversifying lineages  
 that filled their places: mammals, insects, birds, 350  
 the angiosperms, the grasses, the composites;  
 the supple modern fish, the teleosts —  
 all the rich tapestry that drapes the earth  
 and all the living gems that fill the seas  
 and, always present with the visible creatures,  
 around them, under them, above them, in them,  
 the microscopic beings (they too evolved,  
 sorted and screened, diversified, perfected)  
 work in their various ways for good and ill.  
 The way a single drop of dye in water 360  
 will, without stirring, slowly percolate  
 by random motion of the molecules  
 until an even tint pervades the fluid,  
 so in time's jostling pace the organisms  
 have slowly reached to occupy each space  
 earth offers to the probing limbs of life:  
 shoreline and marsh, valley and mountain slope,  
 cold, hot, or dry. Upon Mount Everest  
 and at the edges of the southern ice-cap  
 the clan of Collembola, eldest insect 370  
 known from Devonian rocks, has pitched its outposts;  
 under the thermal waters' seething crystal  
 a blue-green algae lines the grotto walls  
 in azure-shadowed verdant convolutions.  
 And room on room, dwelling within new dwelling,  
 life multiplies the space for life to inhabit:  
 trees lift wind-stirred pavilions, while the soil

roots and bacteria have worked, gives home  
and hunting range to burrowing snout and claw,  
and nothing burrows for itself alone. 380  
For every leaf there grows a mouth to crop it,  
all flesh is food for other flesh, the fiercest  
for carrion-eaters; agents of decay  
return all offal to the fertile soil  
from which new leaves grow for new mouths to crop.  
Through all this reigns a principle of balance,  
such that an overgrowth is checked by dearth  
of prey or forage, or the increase of foes;  
high in the atmosphere growth and decay  
hold converse with the ozone, regulating 390  
sparsity and luxuriance of life  
by unseen paths of chemical exchange  
which in their endless intervolving make  
the one metabolism of the earth.  
Each cycle functions in another cycle  
within the gyres of cosmic revolutions,  
rings formed of day and night, of wax and wane,  
of ebb and flow, of equinox and solstice  
and the great year whose circle is inscribed  
by our North Pole among the unmoving stars. 400  
An order intricate beyond all knowledge  
has risen here in entropy's despite,  
for though life as it lives creates disorder,  
turning its food to waste, dispersing heat,  
yet the sun's constantly-inpouring power,  
caught in transforming cells, redeems the debt  
and more, reorganizing what was scattered  
into new forms that rear from dissolution  
mansions ever more cunning in design,  
yet seeming innocent of all intent 410  
and ignorant of itself, save through our knowing.

## Chapter 5

*The peril of knowledge, and its inevitability in living systems. Origins and development of intelligence. Effects of nurture and of the ability to manipulate objects. Mind and sociality. Emergence of the hominids. Origins of toolmaking, naming and syntax. Neanderthal and modern humans. The birth of Technology.*

This order of the world which we have seen,  
this intricately self-perfecting being,  
calls us to lose ourselves in contemplation,  
and find ourselves in what we see, and fear.  
Through us it blossomed into mind's awareness,  
and mind's awareness threatens it with ruin.  
It bore us and sustains us, yet its law  
for us is pain and death and a self-knowledge  
that shows us in the image of an ape  
or something no more dignified: instinct 10  
with mere behavior, chosen by the factors  
of ancient situations: made, like all,  
in conflict, for more conflict. Reason seems  
projection of our cunning, not First Cause  
but last effect; the soul a phantom, fevered  
by mortal dread; the mask of love is lifted,  
and we behold the reckoning of the genes.  
Not that this mocking mirror ever can  
reflect us truly. "What are we?" we ask,  
and our eye meets the squint of what we *were*, 20  
and of that face our vision is distorted  
by what we *would be*. Those whose will is strife  
and brutal domination, often make  
the simian jaw their charter; others, hoping  
to hold a plea for mercy with the past,  
resift the evidence, here mitigate  
a stricture, there propose an alternate model,  
but theirs the weaker voice. Well may we admire,  
seeing the sequel of such inquiries,  
that wisdom which once set before our kind 30  
the fable of a human pair, created  
perfect, for an immortal life of peace,  
who forfeited that peace by greed for knowledge  
of good and evil, and were thus condemned  
to toil, pain, conflict, degradation, death.

For to have fallen is to have the hope  
of restoration, and the beckoning vision  
of Being high above the floods of time;  
and when imagination takes that height,  
then it can see beyond immediate need 40  
and steer the world toward better, on occasion.  
That vision snatched from us, we can at best  
acknowledge what has been: that we were shaped  
by the increase of knowledge, which procured  
advantage, and avoided threatened ills;  
that through all this we were impelled by need  
which drives all living things; but say this was  
to such end that with faculties entire  
we might as parents of all life survey  
the whole, and for our own advantage take 50  
what may promote survival of the whole,  
perfecting thus our image with and in it,  
and opening life to that which lies beyond  
if intuition tells us right. This makes  
of evolution an ascent, implies,  
perhaps, a goal anterior to time,  
and saves our hope; yet still remains the danger  
that, looking back along the stair ascended,  
we may, like Lot's wife turning back to gaze  
on Sodom, lose the future for the past 60  
and miss the final rung. Yet we must look.

Knowledge: another name for separation.  
Our kind were not the first that tree has fed.  
The primal membrane, that amid the unbounded  
flux of reaction, closed upon a cell,  
cleft a caesura in the text of matter,  
insured its reading by most alien eyes.  
For soon was born a cell that learnt to shrink  
from influences that threatened to dissolve  
its little difference from the ambient matter: 70  
the Uncarved Block of unperceptive being  
was hewn to Yes and No. After the lapse  
of further time, the clustered cells composed  
receptors that could recognize the simple  
shadow of prey or lurking predator.  
Upon the differentiating screen  
further and further shapes gained recognition,

called for new correlations and decisions.  
 In each advance the original parting was  
 repeated, deepened, as the living thing 80  
 won, step by step, resourcefulness and will,  
 elaborating form and self-awareness.  
 And as for death, that shape has shadowed life  
 since the first union of the cells distinguished  
 between the message of the germ and that  
 which lived to bear it. As the errand lengthened  
 with obstacles that placed themselves between  
 the start and once so proximate goal, the fall  
 to dissolution and oblivion  
 when the spent shell, the bearer, was discarded, 90  
 steepened. Until in us who walk upright  
 form turns to see the shadow of its transience  
 and grapple with that shadow all its days.  
 The earth cannot accuse us, having taught  
 shapes and behaviors to whatever came  
 to fill its primal desolation: plants  
 first did it teach to grasp with lightless root  
 into alluvial silt, and lift their green  
 sunward, then on the fattening soil to grow  
 with stiff stems overtopping one another; 100  
 beasts it instructed in the crawling limb,  
 the armored egg, the jaw that cropped and tore,  
 while by the veering of the poles, the heave  
 of mountain chains into the upper air  
 letting the cold in, or their wearing-down  
 to level hills a temperate air enfolded,  
 the dynasties of flesh arose and fell.  
 The shapes of whale and fish, of wolf and dingo,  
 the eye of cephalopod and vertebrate,  
 bespeak the power of the external mold 110  
 on things unkin, yet twinned by their conditions;  
 even so the habit of the mind was set  
 by habitat. For on the various land  
 varying circumstance called forth the wit  
 to choose and change, while wits, encountering,  
 sharpened against each other. Slow, at first,  
 the mind was molded in the reptile clay,  
 in sideward-sprawling and cold-blooded limbs,  
 dull subjects of the sun, that stirred at morning  
 and stopped at night, like factory machines; 120

pursuit and flight impelled the dinosaurs  
to draw their legs in and to hoard their heat  
by some means that maintained them, though unclothed  
warmblooded, all their temperate eon long,  
and let them wake and move toward the beginnings  
of parenthood and nurturing social life,  
till the great winter swept them all away,  
leaving an empty earth to the furred mammals,  
flexible and alert. Thus one account, 130  
one constellation in the evidence;  
and yet however told, the drift seems plain,  
seeing how since the dragon kingdom fell  
the skulls of mammals have gone on enlarging.  
In every age the game of life is played  
more wittingly, not by our kind alone:  
from dolphin sport flashes a conscious joy,  
and in the elephant broods a memory  
that grieves the dead, revisiting their bones.  
Although mind's loftiest crown would fall with us  
if we should fail, yet it might be regrown, 140  
unless we scorch the phylum to the roots.  
As when an equatorial forest tree  
comes crashing down, dragging the tangled vines  
that weave the gloom on high, and thus exposing  
the floor to sudden brightness that sets off  
a burgeoning of growth into the breach —  
plants racing each other to the top  
until the canopy shall close again —  
so after ages when the elements  
have mastered our proud towers, effaced our roads, 150  
covering such debris as will not rot  
and render back its elements to life,  
some unimagined creature that began  
to lift its head when our strong arm sank down  
may occupy our room, and think our thoughts,  
which we had once believed were ours alone.

While still the terror of the dinosaurs  
was on the mammals in their tiny niche,  
the garment of the continents was changed  
to flowering plants, deciduous trees that offered 160  
a maze of branches, ready for new tenants;  
and after that great dying, when the mammals

grew swiftly into their bequeathed domain,  
limbs formed for grasping limbs of trees reached out,  
claws flattened over padded fingertips  
against whose skin crowded the tactile nerves  
reporting to the brain what hold the hand  
had closed on. Eyes that scanned from side to side  
swung forward, fixed together on a point,  
and from their differing reports the brain 170  
measured the distance, gauged the leap. Likewise  
the sense of color now was worked into  
the subtle nerves behind the eye, discerning  
tree-branches motionless in even shade,  
ripeness of fruit. Between the reaching forelimb  
that grasped with fingers and opposing thumb,  
and the keen eye, coordination grew;  
thus with the primate hand came apprehension,  
the world of separate things to be distinguished,  
picked up, examined and manipulated; 180  
the brain amid its ramifying choices  
redoubled and reorganized its networks,  
and with it grew the primate social web,  
the mind that lives beyond the single brain.

Society: not only in the order  
from which our kind descended, is it known.  
For as monadic cells learned to converge  
in bodies, and accept a common fate,  
so has advantage prompted many a kind 190  
to mutual aid: wild geese that flock and fly  
in wedges, while the leader cleaves the wind  
the others follow in an easier air  
until the leader, weary, drops behind  
and the one next in line becomes the prow;  
magpies that in the Australian desert hoard  
their gatherings in common to maintain  
their numbers through perpetual hard times;  
the polity of bees, the termite mound  
powered as by computer that dispatches  
unquestioning numbers to their various tasks 200  
of nurture, forage, war; wolves that deploy  
their stealthy forces round the musk-ox herd  
which, scenting them, in turn draws up its ranks,  
the young and cows within, the bulls without,

to front the foe with hooves and lowered horns.  
 Within each group, the individual fates  
 keep up their sifting. As conditions vary,  
 common or singular expedience moves  
 the selves, the members. Thus cooperation  
 and competition twine their spiral dance, 210  
 most wildly when two groups come front to front  
 and enmity calls comradeship to muster.  
 And through all lists of love and opposition  
 mind answers to the call of mind, becomes  
 complex, to learn communication's ways  
 according to the limits of its matter  
 and form's implicit opportunity.  
 Those mammal structures which afford the young  
 asylum and then nourishment, imply  
 teaching and long attachment, sense of kin 220  
 and concept of the individual being.  
 The primate hand in reaching for the world  
 garners experience the troop or tribe  
 keeps and hands down, lengthening out thereby  
 the tutelage of the young. The mother's burden  
 grows, to be shared among the female kin;  
 the young apes in their common play rehearse  
 their future doings, while the males keep watch  
 and form their ranks of precedence to weave  
 strife and cooperation into one. 230  
 Among them signals multiply. The head  
 becomes a face whose working muscles tell  
 of threat and play, tenderness and submission.  
 The hand, that cunning tool, has learned to make  
 new tools: to peel a twig and fish for termites,  
 break off a branch and shake it at a foe,  
 throw stones, or use a stone to shatter nuts—  
 acts not instinctual, but learned and taught  
 in rudimentary cultures. Humans coax  
 great apes to stammer-sign their uncouth thoughts 240  
 or chip at flint, the way our forbears did,  
 simian skill following behind the human  
 along a trail which dawning comprehension  
 and stumbling luck broke by millennial inches.  
 Now clown, now cannibal, the chimpanzee  
 unwitting acts the fool to our King Lear  
 (although he knows his image in a mirror



and also has been known to die of grief),  
showing us much of what we were, of what  
we are, or have not yet outgrown: shakes hands, 250  
gives kisses, slaps backs, offers his behind  
to a superior, lets himself be groomed,  
by fits and starts devises hunt and war,  
whoops and stomps with comrades in a throng  
as if upon the eve of that dark voyage  
from which we never could return to tell him  
in any language he would understand.

How we set out on that ambiguous journey  
and how that past still speaks in us, we guess,  
though our conjecture sifts like desert sand 260  
among the scattered stones and skeletal leavings  
that mark the trail, three million years and more  
since we begin to recognize ourselves,  
longer, since from the common stem diverged  
gorilla, chimpanzee, and future human.  
Only the hard parts of our evolution  
remain: the indigestible teeth that tell  
of diet; now and then a jaw or thighbone,  
a brain-pan; sequences of battered flint;  
pollen and seeds of vanished vegetation. 270  
Long gone to quick-consuming air the flesh  
of feeling, and the ligaments of signal,  
the weft of withes or rushes, and the gift  
of water in a first cup stitched of leaves—  
gone with all memory of a departure  
without foreknowledge. Perhaps it was a time  
of cooling weather; forests that had fostered  
the primate family on fruits and seeds,  
insects and small game, dwindled. Grasses waited 280  
along the edges for the trees to die  
and seeded in their place. Savannahs opened,  
stretching amid the thronged and shrinking groves,  
and out there moved great herds that cropped the grass  
and carnivores that preyed upon the herds  
and left the meat half-eaten. To their leavings  
came scavengers that fought, or snatched and ran,  
among them upright-walking apes that carried  
stones from which they had struck a flake or two  
that with the sharpened edge they might more quickly

sever the meat from off the bones, and flee. 290  
 The biped gait: in the unsheltered spaces  
 it draws the body under its own shade,  
 the fur is doffed, the thatch of hair grows thicker,  
 the higher eyes can keep a wider lookout,  
 and in the free hands tools are carried, food  
 is brought back to the young, whose long demand  
 grows longer still, more onerous to the mothers,  
 as haste and danger breed them quicker wits  
 and knit them to a closer band. Together  
 stature and brain increase, the group enlarges. 300  
 From scavengers they turn to hunters working  
 by inference and plan; from foragers  
 who merely range and browse, to gatherers  
 who bring back, with their food, a store of knowledge.  
 The throat is formed to more articulate calls,  
 the musculature of jaw and tongue and face  
 nerved to the central seat of understanding.  
 The expanding skull-case multiplies the pain  
 of birth, forcing a wider gate and slowing  
 the steps of woman; waxing mind demands 310  
 a more attentive and prolonged instruction  
 to mold the adult from the helpless young,  
 a different vigilance, to lull the mate  
 come strange from acts wherein she has no share.  
 The primate troop, that centered on the mothers,  
 has lost its ancient matrilineal focus,  
 the male-led hunt reconstitutes the band  
 so that the female, mating, leaves her kin;  
 perhaps in compensation, then, the signals  
 are multiplied among the female strangers, 320  
 fated to weave a texture of relation  
 not given at birth. Concomitantly grows  
 the bond of fatherhood, and single choice  
 of mate contending with polygamy  
 which the male favors, who can sow his seed  
 in many fields that each can bear but one;  
 so female choice of fathers that provide  
 is cast into the balance with the ranking  
 of the male hierarchy, which determines  
 the access of the strongest to the most; 330  
 and seasonal heat, that stirred the primate troop  
 like summer wind with flaunting copulation,

becomes a hidden individual cycle,  
 the external signs of readiness made constant,  
 clipping the pair together all year round,  
 supporting with desire the tenuous bond  
 of common enterprise between two beings  
 different, and marked for further difference,  
 division which the bond itself implies.

–So grew the realms of hunting and of nurture, 340  
 feeding upon each other, yet enjoined  
 to separation, lest the hunter's arm  
 be stayed by fatal softness in the field  
 or turned upon its own within the camp:  
 a human nature that is two in one,  
 the difference an impetus to culture  
 that separates and bridges. Some indeed  
 surmise that it was female choice, attracted  
 in escalating measure to flamboyance  
 of mind, as in the wondrous bowerbirds, 350  
 caused the enormous brain to mushroom out  
 (the singer's fascination for the groupie  
 a remnant of this ancient twist of fate);  
 unless it was that hunting led to war,  
 honing the human mind upon itself,  
 till over both those realms awareness arched  
 the vault of memory and premonition,  
 hemming life in with birth and death, pursuing  
 the adult with the ghost of childhood past,  
 on mere aggression fathering remorse, 360  
 and cruelty as often, by the sharp  
 entering consciousness of other's pain.  
 Dread power of Thought, that presses on itself  
 with all that is unbearable: is it not  
 from self-defense of mind against itself  
 that all the thousand rites of separation,  
 the lattices of sculptured fiction, gods  
 and spirits, terrible in themselves, arise? –  
 is not all human sacrifice a vain  
 propitiation of this last-caught monster 370  
 that tears the hunter's net? And is it more  
 than one more dream in its dementing presence  
 that it was meant for us as a last gift  
 to free us from the limits and the pain  
 of our time-bound becoming, like that quarry

that in the hunt's high fever flashed snow-white,  
invulnerable, before the hunter's eyes,  
who following as on and on it fled  
found a kingdom of enchanted peace?  
– A legend, and its time of telling past; 380  
yet legend from the future borrows leave  
to speak of things that are not yet; and we  
have heard that origin and destiny  
are not the same, even in evolution,  
that faculties framed to a certain function  
may in the course of changing uses come  
to serve another. So may it be with us  
and with this consciousness, our boast and bane.  
But howsoever we trace the cause of thought  
to life's necessities, it would appear 390  
that as the water of a mountain stream  
will find the ocean by one course or other,  
so mind is in some manner bound to seek  
to free itself from circumstance. For always  
what can respond to change with innovation  
secures advantage, and sets new conditions  
wherein, again, the flexible response  
is advantageous. Intellect becomes  
self-reinforcing, founded on itself,  
protagonist amid earth's changing scenes. 400

In Africa, where the tectonic force  
is slowly pushing continents apart,  
lies a broad plain in seeming quietness  
belying the volcano's roar, the rain  
of burning ash, the ground that shuddering  
subsided, then remained a sunken waste.  
Kind seasons brought new seeds, life flowered again  
on its own grave, streams ventured through the  
lowland,  
bringing fresh sediments, filling up the hollows,  
till earth-strain moved the hills again, again 410  
the plain sank down with cries in burning darkness,  
to be reclaimed after the storm of stone  
by life's forgetful hope. Across this plain  
there runs a gorge, now called the Olduvai,  
deep-cut through layers of ash and sand and soil,  
the archive of two thousand thousand years,

and near the floor, the earliest scant remains  
 of handiwork: chipped pebbles, piles of rock –  
 a kind of wall perhaps; within the enclosure,  
 bones cracked to get the marrow out. Here camped, 420  
 it seems, a band of creatures on their way  
 to humanhood. See how the brain-pan's grown,  
 the teeth are smaller – tools now do the tearing –  
 the simian snout's already in retreat,  
 our human vertical countenance implied.  
 Here, in the riven earth's calm intervals,  
 our kind was fostered, stricken and driven forth,  
 returned to thrive and to be stricken again  
 from black and battering heavens; and who knows  
 what shadows from such infancy yet lie 430  
 upon our brains? A million years ago,  
 we guess, some groping tendrils of the vine  
 that bore us, first began to find their way  
 out of that continent. Northeast they headed,  
 along the south shore of that land-bound sea,  
 last remnant of great Tethys from whose bed  
 the Alps and Himalayas were uplifted.  
 The Bosphorus lay then a shallow strait;  
 they crossed it without boats and came to Europe.  
 Across the Asian continent they groped, 440  
 even to the shores of China, everywhere  
 leaving the record of the evolving brain  
 in higher skull-domes and in larger bones  
 of carnivores which they contrived to slay,  
 scattering the earliest artefacts of form  
 repeatedly imprinted upon matter  
 by human will: the hand-axe, knapped out such  
 as it would stay for a full million years,  
 as if invention took one step, then paused  
 in terror of itself. Well, that is hindsight; 450  
 processes have, it seems, a way of starting  
 slowly, the first stones tentatively laid  
 till a foundation is in place, but then  
 a fast, faster and ever faster pace  
 piles the consecutive courses, now the tower  
 seems to be shooting toward the distant stars!  
 So went the gradual quickening of life.  
 It captured fire in Proterozoic times,  
 bound it in respiration, starting off

the race of animate being toward the goal 460  
 of mind, which having reached, our forebears found  
 the naked flame in seams of dampened coal  
 or lightning-kindled forest, took it up  
 and gave it residence in life's domain  
 to throw off vital warmth the way the sun  
 squanders itself in heating empty space —  
 centuries of vegetable labor lost  
 at one night's campfire. And the extravagance  
 is worked into our fiber; for the cooking  
 of meat, say half a million years ago, 470  
 allowed the teeth to be again reduced,  
 less chewing needed, while the frontal ridge  
 to which the jaw was hinged, grew daintier,  
 left more room for the bubble of the brain.  
 Through fire the screen they raised against the wind  
 closed to a second body. Caves could now  
 be warmed, and the great cave-bears scared away.  
 Fire-comforted they ventured further north  
 while the great glaciers of the Pleistocene  
 were weighing down the Eurasian continent. 480  
 Two hundred thousand years ago, perhaps,  
 hands that had shaped hand-axes learnt to score  
 a lump of flint and strike it with a hammer  
 of bone, so that the keen-edged flake flew off  
 a ready blade: an implement was made  
 to make another implement, a purpose  
 took aim from further off; and we surmise  
 that round that act of making the winged words  
 were venturing upon their maiden flight.

Language: again, no human property 490  
 alone. The social body moves by signals,  
 be they but pheromones released, received  
 as between cell and brother-cell, or fixed  
 gestures, the weaving honey-dance transmitting,  
 without deliberation, simple data  
 to instigate the unreflecting act.  
 The mating-strut of grouse, the begging-stance  
 of gulls, likewise unchosen and unvaried;  
 the vervet's repertory of alarms  
 (Leopard! Eagle! Snake!) still automatic, 500  
 save for that monkey-trick of crying "Leopard!"

to fright another monkey from its food:  
 Aha, Deceit is born, a little crack  
 opened between the signal and the world.  
 Though still below the horizon, the word-sun  
 is heralded where on the creature's mind  
 the shapes of need or fear are printed, linked  
 with patterns of appropriate reaction.  
 Near enough is the making of the name  
 to animal cogitation that the apes 510  
 can learn to tell us of their simple wishes,  
 though for themselves they do not find it out.  
 Scarce different from their disjointed signings  
 are childhood's earliest articulations,  
 the stammerings of those unfortunates  
 cast out in infancy, the pidgin-speech  
 of adults mixed without a common tongue.  
 Among the dolphin-whistles we begin  
 to make out names they have for one another —  
 who knows, they may have crossed the second  
 threshold 520  
 into the workshop of syntactic order,  
 where among names of things and acts are fashioned  
 ligatures that relate and qualify,  
 give place and time, assign the roles of action,  
 and make of scattered things and acts a world,  
 the objective world, that can be mapped and plotted,  
 held in the mind, though this or that be absent,  
 evoke responses more and more considered  
 in a constructive process that keeps building  
 its organs of production and reception. 530  
 The human mind, at least, was globed to hold  
 this model of the universe approaching  
 ever more, in complexity, the real.  
 Almost our speech outgrows communication  
 to serve the mind that thinks in solitude  
 as loom of free decisions and devisings  
 based upon differentiating knowledge  
 that from an ever-wider ken arrives;  
 yet this includes new knowledge of each other  
 as, hearing through the word, we see the world 540  
 the other speaker sees, echolocating  
 the center of the other mind's concern.

When did we enter this reflecting world?  
Between the age of two and three the child,  
taught, as it seems, by social interaction  
which sets some program in the brain to work  
at peak for brief years, gets the hang of syntax.  
The growing mind mysteriously crosses  
a line, the faultline of the breakthrough when  
upon the genus Homo's drafting-board 550  
the plan of us emerged, to supersede  
all previous versions.

One of which we must  
have known. A century and more ago  
we came on their extinguished hearths, in Europe  
along the river-valleys where the cliffs  
of limestone stand exposed with many a door  
to caverns hollowed out by water seeping  
through centuries toward the level of the river.  
Their bones first found in the Neanderthal  
gave them a name; they for themselves no doubt 560  
had found a name, although no echo now  
returns those syllables. Their skulls were large;  
the brain in contrast to our own appears  
pushed back by pressure on the heavy brow;  
their women were broad-hipped, as if to bear  
young fuller-grown and less in need of teaching,  
more bound to instinct than we deem ourselves,  
nor is it certain that the throat was wholly  
fashioned for delicate articulations;  
but the variety of flinty tools 570  
bespeaks increased autonomy of mind,  
and bones that bear the scars of knitted breakings  
mean that their arduous life was mitigated  
by care for injured kin. Their camps were small,  
a score or two at most. They had no art,  
although we sometimes find a tool that looks  
as if its maker liked the way it looked;  
there are those lumps of manganese and ochre,  
sharpened like pencils, scratched to give a powder —  
their bodies, then, they painted, were aware 580  
of their own forms, wanted somehow to improve them.  
They left some crystals they had gathered, lumps  
of mammoth-tusk, smoothed to no definite shape  
but ochre-stained, like inarticulate prayer,



and graves. First witness of remembering pain,  
anticipating fear, and groping hope.  
The haunch of meat provided for the journey,  
the ochre paint, the flowers once heaped here  
(their pollen lasts), the ibex horns: farewell.  
Now Death is in the world, the Sign is born 590  
to mark our place in life's forgetful tome.  
– Thus we evoke the ghost of ancient mind  
that may have parleyed with our far foreparents,  
who knows, in pidgin sign.

From Africa

these neighbors came, the latest flake struck off  
from human evolution's ancient core:  
a people taller and less ponderous,  
the brain less great, yet domed above the brow,  
where language and reflection have their thrones;  
and finished, also, was the instrument 600  
of utterance, the larynx. Their encampments  
seem more elaborate, structured. Most are small;  
some, at the center, larger. It appears  
that we had found our oldest social form,  
the band of bands, that seasonally meets,  
social complexity that correlates,  
we think, with the complexifying sentence.  
Their grave-goods hold a language, though obscure  
articulate, of set belief. The tools  
time buried with their earliest hearths are simple, 610  
bound by the ancient slow-learned ways of making.  
Then – fifty, forty thousand years ago –  
as if time once again has shifted gears,  
or as if one fine morning a connection  
clicked between language's exuberant  
domain, and the still-fallow field of handwork,  
suddenly in the record there's a burst  
of radiating shapes. Spear-point and scraper,  
spear-thrower made of straightened antler-bone,  
blades, leaf-shaped, this blade too thin for use – 620  
ceremonial; amulet, petroglyph.  
The kingdom of Technology is founded,  
likewise the realm of mind-informing Art.  
To this the old, the slow ones had no answer.  
They melted from the slopes of the Levant  
and then in Europe, at the glaciers' hem,

fell back from east to west, a long retreat  
of thirteen thousand years. At the frontier  
of France and Spain we find some tools they seem  
to have fashioned in a puzzled imitation 630  
of the supplanter's art, an ornament—  
trade-goods, possibly. Somewhere in Spain  
upon the air for the last time there sounded  
whatever syllables their throats had formed  
to name themselves, the shapes they saw and made;  
and on our tongues no doubt some name for them  
lingered on while the uncouth figures darkened  
back into the shadows of those dreams  
that haunt the fringes of our human life  
where live so many things that never were, 640  
bogey and troll and unicorn and dragon,  
their unreal forms the by-blows of that skill  
in naming, making, that is half our knowing.  
The earth was ours. The tools were in our hands,  
our minds, to master it, to solve such problems  
as predators might pose, to meet new needs  
with new devices, to come face to face  
with one another, with the universe,  
and with the ultimate riddle of ourselves.

## Chapter 6

*“Human nature,” the overall human behavior pattern. Earliest traces of modern humans. The Lascaux culture and its collapse. Origin of agriculture as a response to environmental depletion. Civilization as a consequence of agriculture. Changes wrought by civilization in the structure of society and consciousness. Crystallization of the scientific method and increased pace of technological development. Population growth, industrialization, and exploitation of fossil fuels. Increasing specialization of knowledge and fragmentation of society; limits to human expansion.*

These strangers who, from tract of earth untraced  
where their design from ceaseless dice had leapt,  
now scattered forth to dispossess their kin  
by steps inexorable: they were ourselves,  
so far as body's heritage has made us.  
They had our present cast of countenance;  
they looked upon the world, not yet their own,  
from the same whorls of enterprising brain;  
and in them also lived the algorithm  
of human social life, deeply imprinted 10  
in matter's memory, if we conclude  
rightly from variegated tales brought back  
by those who in the steps of farthest tribes  
have trudged, and noted all their customs down.  
Some things are constant through the variation  
of circumstance, emerging everywhere,  
like language, always in a different form,  
the forms, although opaque to one another,  
betrayed by structure to the objective eye  
as the projections of one selfsame mind. 20  
In every human language there are names  
for kin, and every person has a name;  
all humans gesture, joke, and greet; all build  
in space of speech the branching tree of syntax,  
ordering (though on each particular stem  
in varying arrangement) thing and action  
in time and space, by attribute and manner;  
and in the background of all utterance  
all doubtless feel the far-subtending web  
Association, whereby every word 30  
spoken sends tremors all throughout our thought,

as the entire world's being underlies  
 each thing and motion. And as in our speech,  
 so in the actions of our aggregates  
 the code of our inheritance is at work.  
 All human tribes are parsed in ranks of age  
 and status, men's and women's work distinguished;  
 all know authority and government  
 beginning with spontaneous recognition  
 of wit and strength, elaborating more 40  
 as numbers and increasing skills compel.  
 All mark out channels for the sexual flow,  
 barring incestuous union; courtship, marriage  
 have their due uses, pregnancy and birth  
 are girt with custom. Food likewise is taken  
 at set times, and mysterious curbs imposed  
 on the enjoyment of some food or other;  
 cleanliness also is defined and taught.  
 The child receives instruction in set manner  
 and passes to adulthood through the gates 50  
 of ritual, to sever childhood's ties;  
 adults are bound by kinship obligations  
 and by the jurisdiction of the law;  
 all know cooperative enterprise,  
 the rights of property, the fair exchange,  
 gift-giving and the welcoming of guests.  
 The family celebrates itself in feasts,  
 and play configures in game and sport;  
 various arts enhance the body's form,  
 shape the skull's thatch, and give to implements 60  
 a graceful superfluity of design,  
 a meaning to accompany simple use.  
 The end of life is solemnly acknowledged,  
 the dead have funeral rites, and their bequests  
 are parcelled by some rule among the living.  
 And every tribe surmises that our life  
 is acted on a stage some cosmic power  
 has set, and which it someday will dismantle,  
 though differently they narrate the beginning  
 and guess the end. Moreover, they assume 70  
 that in the natural and the human world  
 spiritual agents work, to which the soul  
 is linked, with which it can communicate  
 by divination, ritual and dream,

by spells that heal the ills of mind and body  
or make the weather answer human need  
or close what other gaps tend to appear  
between our will and power.

All of this

is common property of all our kind,  
although we do not know how much is ours 80  
alone, the outcome of those accidents  
that formed us as the species that we are,  
and how much is the shadow of the earth  
which it would cast on any creatural mind  
that dared to wake and view it; or conversely  
the mind's conditions, which it must impose  
on matter that would bear it to full term—  
as, in both squid and vertebrate, the eye  
has twice by chance and fate designed itself.  
For mind that can deliberate the whole 90  
to choose one path in it above another,  
not blindly pulled between mere precedent  
and the demanding moment, must have had  
the freedom of the child, that space of play  
sheltered from urgency and consequence;  
and yet to tend the nursery of mind  
there must be custom, must be precedent  
and actions placed by order of the kind  
beyond the range of hasty alteration.  
Moreover, mind at full must operate 100  
within a concentrating solitude,  
yet therein must be fed by others' labor  
with food and information and ideas,  
and many must bring forth what one devised.  
From this, perhaps, we have the thrust of self  
and kinship's far-reticulating syntax  
that captures it; we have the double vision  
imaging both the people and the one  
who lives and dies within it and alone.

This tension of society and self, 110  
these tensions among selves, are mediated  
by language above all. The light of words  
illumines an objective world wherein  
the thought of justice and of good proportion  
arises to stare down the mere dynamics

of dominance and desire. By means of language  
folk understand each other, and combine  
to keep in check the individual  
who also pleads his individual cause.  
Yet words alone, though certain good, would not 120  
have power to hold the people's form together.  
For this a darker strength must be invoked:  
the presences of gods, avenging spirits,  
dread rites that to the eye of strangers' reason  
often appear irrational, absurd,  
the food of satire and of indignation.  
All those grotesque initiatory ordeals,  
those costly sacrifices, all that time  
wasted in acts without utility, 130  
make sense, if seen as countermeasures to  
the calculation of self-interest  
which otherwise would tear the group apart,  
reward rapacity and stinginess,  
deprive the child of food and rearing, set  
the whim of the most forceful in the place  
of common counsel and the common good.  
Thus Mystery rocked the cradle of our logos,  
inseparable the two, as form from message.

And there where mystery and logos meet 140  
there looms, as if it were a shape that lived  
within the heartwood of the human tree,  
the Poet. Shaman, healer, storyteller,  
lawgiver – sometimes one or more of these,  
but always keeper of that rhythmic vocal  
murmur that rose before articulate speech  
when with coordinated shouts and stampings  
the primate troop affirmed its unity.  
When man took up a stone, and chipped, and named it,  
that pulse took up the name. And as the names  
multiplied, as syntax branched and rooted, 150  
as the articulate world's unbounded reaches  
began to intimate a universe  
to the astonished brain, there grew the skill  
to bring these data home to the heart's pulse,  
to synchronize the pulses of the tribe  
while giving human form to information,  
building in words a picture of the world

by which the tribe could see to work as one,  
 to do or bear what must be done or borne  
 by each and all. In every enterprise, 160  
 in hunting and in warfare, in the passage  
 of adolescence, in the courtship-dance,  
 the making of the marriage-bond, the labor  
 of birth and childcare; in the gathering-season,  
 in winter's weary leisure; in the heat  
 of quarrels cooled by storied precedent,  
 by rules stored up in memory-making verse,  
 and in the chill of death and loss, now known,  
 feared, bewailed: there Poesy appeared  
 to soothe, to rouse, to counsel, and at last 170  
 to give release out of particular pain  
 into the harmony of greater being  
 of which whatever happens is a part.  
 Is not our whole existence, all our search  
 for meaning, all our making sense, poetic?  
 Is poetry not implicated in  
 the making of the human mind itself,  
 the coalescence of the great cathedral,  
 the overarching castle of our reason,  
 from the chapels and the huts of ad-hoc skill? 180  
 This oldest trade in which no one can tell  
 the worker from the wrought: this gift was given  
 to all, yet concentrated in a few,  
 perhaps one in one hundred delegated  
 by the group-fate, to be its carrier,  
 to feel forever the itch and tug of words  
 and be forever weaving them: a labor  
 like ritual costly, often painful, often  
 useless-seeming, and yet somehow known  
 to nourish. So the ancient peoples held 190  
 the poet – as we piece from shards of still-  
 persisting tales and customs, from the fates  
 and characters of those still born among us  
 with song's long-countermanded order ringing  
 loud in their souls – in the awe of sacred things.

Thus constituted, humankind then came  
 into their wide inheritance, as stretch  
 by stretch they marked the continents their own:  
 in Africa the overhanging rocks

were scored with figures of the hunter's dance, 200  
soon duplicated on the Australian shore,  
where storm or early feat of boatcraft bore them;  
in the Ukraine they left us mammoth bones  
fitted to patterned huts; while in the south  
of France, the north of Spain, the caves bear witness  
to a new-opened and observant eye  
under the zenith of the hunter's sun  
proudly providing. No doubt in the clement  
season the women gathered on the tundra,  
but with less need than in these latter days 210  
on the depleted lands where oftentimes  
men come back empty-handed from the hunt.  
It is not the complaint of want that strikes  
the mind's ear, when in fantasy we venture  
where the Vézère winds south through limestone  
valleys,  
its course so little changed through so much change:  
the few notes of a bone flute try the air  
in some forgotten scale, and there is song  
among the facing cave-mouths. All things breathe  
the primal superfluity of nature 220  
our new-forged mind had just begun to harvest,  
and mind, too, overflowed. Those necklaces  
of bone and shell, these fine-knapped blades of flint  
too thin for use, yet pleasing to the eye,  
that reindeer-antler or that mammoth-tusk  
with animal counterfeit engraved or carved,  
this slate on which improving forms were traced  
as the hand taught itself creation's likeness,  
and, far back in the cavern's winding depths,  
the paintings. Manganese and ochre mixed 230  
with fat—still fresh. Aurochs, rhinoceros  
and mammoth loom with intimated bulk  
yet light, cloudlike almost. Though we surmise  
that this was magic, that by capturing  
the quarry so in lines against the stone  
the artist thought to help the hunter's hand  
or to assist the labor of the earth  
in whose remotest recess, only reached  
by straitest passageways, they were implanted—  
yet in these shapes breathes the acknowledgment 240  
of what is beyond capture, merely there



and there for all time, though the gate be closed  
through which those creatures poured into the world.  
– But what about these lumps of stone or ivory  
that bulge beneath the thumb to belly and breast,  
without a face, or feet on which to stand?  
What invocations did the carvers chant?  
Did laboring women clutch them in their fists,  
or were they meant as talismans of increase,  
tokens of earth's blind generosity, 250  
or toys, idly carved out and idly fingered  
by man, a hunter's daydream of much flesh?  
Ask the masked staring dancer, horned and hoofed,  
skin-clad, maleness aswing, or her who stands,  
frontal on the cave wall in high relief,  
faceless, but holding up the bison horn  
as if she would command some ceremony.  
These with their mysteries ranked behind them witness  
the other mode of seeing, that is not sight  
but rather the extrusion of some impulse 260  
into the visible, or the imposition  
of will upon what rises to the eye.  
And more the stream that flowed through them to mix  
their urges in our blood, will never murmur.

For three times longer than the turbulent scroll  
of our recorded history can tell,  
while the invisible pointer of the pole  
made almost a full circle in the stars,  
they lived as though the world could never change,  
unless the chain of their ancestral tales 270  
made them aware of the millennial pace  
of glaciers' slow encroachment and withdrawal,  
or the flint-masters, the Solutreans,  
who interrupt the sequence of our finds,  
furnished a theme for sagas. But to us  
nothing among their artefacts implies  
the thought of history. At most they kept  
a tally of the days from dark to full  
in scratchings upon bone; perhaps the seasons,  
the ebb and flow of plenty, were to them 280  
vicissitude enough.

And yet things changed.  
That early and most generous gift of earth,

the great herds of rhinoceros and mammoth,  
 wild horse and giant deer, the hunters spent,  
 with fire and shout driving them over cliffs  
 and leaving what they could not eat to rot,  
 having the skill to slay, the pride of prowess,  
 but not the thought of farther consequence.  
 Or, since they were as wise as we, perhaps  
 they had the thought, but could not lend it action, 290  
 the hunters being the stronger, and each one  
 determined to be first. I seem to see,  
 from far off, some Cassandra of the caves  
 being put to silence by the sorcerers  
 with promises that still more simulacra  
 in the earth's gut will cause her to bring forth  
 an even greater plenty than before.  
 So while the later middens tell of meals  
 made from the leavings of the ancestral feast—  
 fishbones, and bones of small game taken singly— 300  
 deep in the earth the great shapes multiplied,  
 the energy of art was gathered, flung  
 against the wall of circumstance, in vain.  
 Impassioned act of sight could not restore  
 the squandered herds, nor peg the shrinking line  
 of ice that melted as the world grew warm  
 and trees began to grow upon the tundra,  
 blocking the run of droves; so natural cause  
 conspired with the results of human action  
 to end an age, till the last sorcerer 310  
 flung down his brush, the people's pride was broken.  
 Upon their middens lived impoverished clans,  
 who left no art but pebbles crudely painted  
 with abstract markings, as if to record  
 some groping and unformulable question,  
 while to the northern bogs, now bare of ice,  
 flocked the resourceful, there made shift to live  
 by bow and arrow, boat and knot and fish-trap,  
 gathering the forest's small and varied gifts  
 and making little art, as though they'd learned 320  
 to trust in their own wits more than in spirits.

But to the east and south—in southern Asia  
 on lands the Indus levels, and in Egypt  
 whose Nile renewed each year the fruitful ground,

and on the plain spread by twin streams that take  
their wandering courses toward the Persian Gulf –  
there germinated first the novel plant  
called Agriculture. Whether happenstance  
had sown it, like those unintended gardens  
from seeds at the communal gathered meal 330  
let fall at random, later noticed, tended,  
or whether some inventive dream had granted  
a wish for settled life and sturdy shelter,  
refuge for age's failing strength, and pardon  
for infants' ill-timed birth upon the trail –  
these have the tillers of the past to ponder.  
Along the Nile, the Tigris and Euphrates  
and in between, on that half-fertile strip  
where an embattled faith has pitched its tents,  
we trace the progress of a people living 340  
first from the wandering herds; as these began  
to fail, they settled in one place to gather  
the small and steady harvest of its seasons:  
the inconspicuous creatures of the field,  
fish, crabs, and turtles, snails and gathered herbs,  
and most the slopes clothed in wild wheat and barley,  
whose seed commanded now the heavy quern,  
the vessels where it might be stored away  
between the tides of harvest. So the plants  
held them to earth before they came to sow. 350  
In settled life their numbers grew beyond  
what the wild growth afforded; then it was,  
perhaps, that spades began to tear the garment  
of earth, and thrust into unwilling ground  
seeds that it would not of itself have nurtured.  
At human touch the plant was altered: soon  
the fragile joints within the ear of grain,  
which once the winds had broken and dispersed,  
grew tougher to await the gathering hand  
which sowed but from its harvest; and likewise 360  
the remnants of the roving herds, compelled  
or lured to fold, were led and fed and bred  
by husbandmen who gradually remolded  
their form and temper to a master's use.  
So led, so groping, pressed by need and lured  
by ingenuity, our kind proceeded  
along a road that could not be gone back.

The larger numbers that the farming life  
supported, never would again contract  
into the few the unaided land could nourish; 370  
the forest cleared for fields no more provided  
cover for all the various creatures, gone  
to leave room for the human and the tame,  
nor could the gene-clogged tame again run wild.  
Henceforth the life of field and pasture lived  
by human sufferance and human labor  
which earned, each year, a harvest of more labor  
from soil that now lay stripped beneath the rain,  
starved of its annual tribute of decay,  
and less resilient to vicissitude 380  
than wildlife's ancient many-threaded weave.  
When humans lived at hazard, they had leisure,  
plucking the fruit they need not sow nor tend;  
thus the impoverished tribes that still subsist  
on meager lands the stronger do not covet  
work a few hours, then spend the rest in play.  
The choice between two modes of life was made  
before we dreamed that we had had a choice,  
nor could the mind unravel its own making  
even if it would; whether it would, a question 390  
too hypothetical to be decided  
although it cast the shadow of a longing  
backward in fables of a golden age  
that sigh to us from legend's earliest script.

Are they then true, our backward-gazing dreams,  
or only foam of an odd ripple pulling  
against the current carrying each toward death  
and all toward the abyss we have in view?  
Perhaps the gods and goddesses Old Europe  
brought forth before the chariot-people came 400  
remember. Little idols, they would sit  
upon your palm, masked, half-animal forms  
without the darkness of the brute; the sun  
that warmed the first fields glistens from them yet:  
small gifts to charm the powers of earth and sky  
and make the hut of stones their cheerful fane.  
But in this man who sits propping his chin  
as if in thought, and in the woman carved  
by the same hand, there is a simple sadness

that seems to rise from earth itself to fill 410  
 their gestures and the hollows of their eyes,  
 as if they saw for all time, and could bear  
 what they perceived without pretence or protest;  
 as if they lived beneath no harsher law  
 than the primordial reign of birth and death.  
 But there are other retrospects, less soothing.  
 Those bards who from the heart's primordial darkness  
 drew forth the stuff for many a dreary saga  
 of brood-devouring ancestors, from whom  
 the life-spring rises tainted with a curse, 420  
 saw true, it seems. The river-sands that covered  
 that camp at Klasies, near our starting-post,  
 have cast us up as in our earliest dawn  
 we were: as hunters of ourselves. For these  
 cracked bones were ours, and ours the hands that  
 cracked them  
 for marrow; and our earliest monument  
 was not a cemetery, but a midden.  
 How came we to be so? The earth was all  
 before us in those days, with room to send  
 our overflowing generations forth 430  
 on ever-bounteously-unfolding lands.  
 Is it then in our power of reflection  
 that the dark deed is rooted, that the seed  
 of bloodlust sprouted from the hunt's behavior?  
 Or did that need to bind the clan together  
 for hunt and nurture's work, entail the shadow  
 of alienness thrown on the semblable  
 no party to our bond, and fastened there  
 by hate's abominable poetry? Or was  
 that first Thyestian feast an aberration, 440  
 an ancient Jonestown episode, preserved  
 and as if malevolence unearthed  
 to second now, with thunder from the past,  
 our generation's self-dismay?  
 With mixed  
 results we dig through ancient layers and sagas  
 and ask the tribes that still survive among us  
 if humankind in its first nature was  
 more martial or pacific. For the lives  
 of those that had not walked the modern path  
 till our own time, were marred with mutual fear, 450

with war the common lot of men. And yet  
the warrior was mistrusted, war decried;  
and though the warrior-hero stock the sagas,  
peace also has bequeathed its archetypes.  
The leader who could judge and reconcile  
and lend the authority of strength to counsel,  
the elder-woman versed in herbs and heart-paths,  
parents of all the children of their people,  
loom through the memory of generations  
amid the troupe of jesters, hunters, fighters, 460  
makers, that traveled the long road of time,  
stock characters the human plot required.

Whatever our original disposition  
in the conditions that had brought it forth,  
in which it may have seemed to function freely,  
we altered those conditions and, misfitting  
the new, became a problem to ourselves.  
To the limits of mortality, inherent  
in all flesh, but by conscious mind alone  
felt as imposed, there soon were superadded 470  
new, mind-forged fetters; for the added weight  
of labor was not equally divided.

The strong compelled their weaker kin to do  
more than their share, already hard enough;  
from level humankind the masters rose,  
and slaves, to raise them up, were burdened down,  
while garnered wealth called forth marauding bands  
and ringed itself with ponderous defense.

At Jericho, before a potter's hand  
had shaped the clay, before the furnace heat 480  
had drawn a blade of iron from the ore,  
around the huddled huts a trench incised  
itself in bedrock; at its rim they piled  
a wall and high round tower of undressed stone  
whose stump is still in earth, a heap of witness  
to the brotherhood of civil life and war.

And as when deep beneath a mass of rock  
an ancient sediment is pressed and heated,  
the layers are twisted and new crystals form,  
so in the growing pressure of our numbers 490  
the social mind was changed. For we had wandered  
through sparsely-peopled ages, always knowing

the souls of a few nearest kin, the faces  
of neighboring bands encountered now and then  
for trade and marriage, or a seasonal feast.  
Here strength and skill spoke for themselves, and led  
the people simply through their simple straits.  
But in the flood of masks our cities poured  
toward us, each covering a past unguessed,  
unkin, beyond our sense to sort them out, 500  
what could we do except hatch out abstractions,  
set categories and degrees of rule  
that brought proliferation once again  
into the limits of our comprehension?  
Only that rank and person seldom now  
were fitted, and too wide or narrow shoes  
chafed many a foot. The official who had come  
into an office not for him devised,  
serving the public, served himself in secret.  
So underneath the social architecture 510  
that grew from tribe to settled town to state  
seethed a disorder of the unacknowledged,  
more tenebrous for every lucid tier.

The city and the state: these first took order  
along the banks of those broad-bearing rivers,  
Indus, Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, carriers  
of fertile soil, and moving highways apt  
for commerce and for war. Upon them floated  
the farmer's tribute and the troops that came  
from far and farther, until foreign rule 520  
became the fixed condition of the masses.  
Then rose the first true idols of man's power,  
the totem-headed deities of Egypt,  
the gods of Sumer with their glaring eyes,  
colossal shadows cast in stone and bronze  
by empire's self-fulfilled hallucination,  
bidding the common people bow and serve,  
think thoughts stamped out in these same idols' mold,  
and offer what they ill could spare, that kings,  
nobles and priests might live in stately pomp 530  
while the poor people dreamed of being kings,  
the wills of many paralyzed to make  
a body that could move with single will.  
To forge the enormous puppet's brain and sinew

all arts were busy: ritual and myth  
 reared ziggurats of the imagination,  
 the law laid out its courts and antechambers,  
 the word that flew from mouth to mouth was caught  
 and pressed into a sign on scroll or tablet  
 to keep exaction's reckonings, bring commands 540  
 from capital to province, or proclaim  
 whatever version of the time's events  
 the rulers wished to see received as truth.  
 The ingathered excess of the peasant's toil  
 hired artisans to shape with deepening skill  
 the loom and boat, the weapon and the bowl,  
 the mirror and the necklace and the comb;  
 set the geometers to calculate  
 with accuracy the monumental line,  
 the movements of the stellar mechanism 550  
 to which the enterprise of state was timed;  
 sent merchants out, and miners to unearth  
 copper and tin which, fused together, yielded  
 the prouder idol and the deadlier blade,  
 and from this industry we name the age.

Civilization thus began: a word  
 spoken with pride, as if it made us civil  
 and gave sagacity, till recent doubt  
 put irony's quotation-marks around it  
 and turned the praise to blame, perhaps unjust. 560  
 It would not be the fault of states, per se,  
 if with the increase of our populations  
 clash upon clash gives greater weight to force.  
 By acts of force, as well as by the common  
 consent of enterprise, our cities rose;  
 but force has winnowed, too, the remnant peoples  
 of jungle, tundra, desert, archipelago,  
 shaping their customs and their minds to war,  
 the gentlest dwelling on the poorest lands  
 where at extinction's verge our travelers found them, 570  
 till it could seem that this is the direction  
 which time takes in the human universe,  
 as entropy marks time among the atoms:  
 through wound on wound the deadly arrow flies!  
 Unless we reckon with the other current  
 that pulls toward solidarity, restraint



of violent impulse for the common good,  
so far as that consists in not capsizing  
the structure into which all are now fixed  
and whose mechanic arms, lowered and raised 580  
by human chains, see to the needs of all –  
lift water to the upper fields, bring grain  
to table, iron to the forge, protect  
what imposition leaves from mere marauding.  
So arbitrariness, at least, is chastened,  
a semblance of benevolence imposed,  
if specious; and behind the masks there opens  
the space of private life and private conscience  
to which society directs its voice  
where its surveillance cannot reach, and pleads 590  
for voluntary efforts toward its peace.  
The mind in isolation comes to bear  
the weight of the whole world, and to devise  
schemes of a general peace, as it would have  
peace in itself; and it has left its marks  
among the signs of commerce, setting down  
the reckonings of truth and self-delusion  
as it strained to conceive some lucid final  
state of humankind, in all ways better  
than we suppose the first state to have been. 600  
So one might proffer that unevenly,  
with many a letting-go, the word has pulled  
against the opposite tendency of time.

But knowledge travels with another pace;  
and from the word, too, time exacts its price.  
For as on outward surfaces the hand  
lays down the signs in linear trains of thought,  
the figure of the poet, of the one  
in whom the memory and consciousness  
of kin reposed, begins to fade, the first 610  
casualty of a process that replaces  
the human being with its own creations.  
With memory transferred from mind to matter,  
the main part of an occupation  
not merely learned, but fashioned in the nerve  
is gone. And with it goes the integration  
of what is learned with what we inly are.  
Knowledge no longer known by heart increases,

increasingly increases, over time,  
till it could seem as though, made instrumental 620  
to instruments we cannot choose to make,  
we move toward destinies no longer ours.

Technology: it lies not in the making  
of tools alone, but in the record kept  
of how the tools are made, so that a tool  
begets a tool, the way the formula  
within the cell reconstitutes itself  
in other cells, a second evolution,  
impelled by human purpose, and yet strangely  
alien to our sense of human being: 630

impersonal, self-oblivious, it builds  
an edifice that may not be dismantled,  
no stone removed from where it has been set  
until forgetfulness shall overwhelm  
the human brain, and from between our signs  
wash out the mortar of significance.  
How few are the lost skills of fabrication,  
how many the forgotten songs and graces;  
how scattered seem the insights of the heart  
beside the keenly-mortised pyramid 640  
which ordered swarms of numbers, agelong, raise  
toward the approving silence of the stars!

And in our time the contrast most appears;  
for as the crystal of the number sets  
around us, in us, reaching to the cell,  
the nucleus, the synapse – so the word  
of mutuality and admonition,  
of consequential pondering, on which  
the house of moral order sought to rise,  
seems to go fragile, shiver into fragments 650  
not to be added up again, mere echoes  
twisted by tunnels of frivolity  
into a chaos of unmeaning sound!

Saving the peasant's inarticulate  
distrust of novelty, such deconstruction  
was not foreseen when we began to sift  
the world's appearances, not yet denuding  
material being of poetic image,  
still trusting in the qualities that strike

our motley senses, prone to metaphor: 660  
 humours and elements and mystic male  
 and female powers were begot to rivet  
 the world of substance to our waking dream.  
 Experiment and speculation seldom  
 conversed; for thought, cradled in lofty leisures,  
 rested on labors that it knew not of;  
 while those who forged the metal, mixed the glaze,  
 improved the loom, the furnace and the mill,  
 were slaves, or artisans of low degree,  
 toiling for those who scorned them in the dark 670  
 of trial and error, without theory.  
 Success itself earned handicraft the name  
 of mystery; magic and cause were mixed  
 in one retort. And though the calculations  
 of the star-gazers, the geometers  
 employed to lay foundation-lines, draw borders,  
 schedule campaigns, attained clear consequence,  
 their usage still was intertwined with rites,  
 omens and auspices that steered the soul  
 of empire, while upon ingenious wheels 680  
 its juggernaut body turned around.  
 There have been times when to the rulers' counsel  
 a too-clear understanding of the world  
 appeared inopportune, as undermining  
 the mythic props on which their power stood;  
 or in a manner less defined, the pressure  
 of hierarchic rule intensified  
 and made more absolute each generation  
 packed the mind down into a deepening rut  
 from which it could not rise to new invention. 690  
 There have been ages, too, of overthrow  
 that cut the roads and turned the empire's servants  
 back to the soil to grub their meager life.  
 Then the motion of the star of knowledge  
 seemed retrograde. Manuscripts burned or rotted,  
 the implements of scattered craft lay idle,  
 their use forgotten, till somewhere again  
 amid the swirling flood of feudal strife  
 the clods began to cling around some reed  
 and a new social continent arose, 700  
 along whose fresh-paved roads a call went out  
 for all the useful secrets hand and brain

could recollect, or glean from ancient cypher,  
or wring once more from ever-faithful matter  
which to the selfsame question always gives  
the selfsame answer, in whatever age.

So time and space are strewn with the false starts  
and the dead ends of technologic progress.

Enfolded in the jungles of the south,  
the Mayan ruins, reawakened, speak 710

of cities gorged with sacrificial blood  
that burst and were forgotten like a dream  
by peasant generations, that hoed on,  
oblivious as their long-forgiving land;  
but the parched valleys of the Indus lie  
desolate these three thousand years and more  
because the axes stripped the hills of trees  
to fire the kilns to bake the many bricks  
to build Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.

Sparse pasture now is the Sumerian plain 720  
which agelong irrigation sowed with salt;

and in the late age of the Eastern realms,  
long home to subtle skill and deep conjecture,  
habits of despotism and resignation  
had slowed invention's pace and tamed the mind  
to walk along the ancestral trail, nor seek  
to redesign the machinery of fate.

What curious property had Europe's soil  
that from it sprang, like some great baobab  
whose roots go deep enough to split the planet, 730  
the iron tree of universal science?

What hand assembled here the elements  
of destiny and thought that, once combined,  
became the thought and destiny of all?  
—Say the Phoenicians first, a merchant people  
impatient with those scribal mysteries,  
cuneiform and hieroglyph, the signs  
almost as numerous as the world of objects  
and suited to the learning of but few.

They broke the word to its component sounds 740

and to each vowel and consonant assigned  
a single mark, that all who spoke might spell  
and change their thought for writing's ready coin.  
This alphabet the Hebrews and the Greeks

adapted for their ends: these to set down  
 the instructions of a God they held above  
 the gods of place, the kings of time, as source  
 of universal justice; these to trace  
 the searchings of a mind that owns no law  
 save its own logic and the truth that stands 750  
 unveiled to all impartial open eyes  
 or whispers nameless to the listening heart,  
 as Socrates proclaimed, when he consented  
 to die for thoughts that undermined the myths  
 that seemed to hold the commonwealth together.  
 His word and act have echoed through the halls  
 of history, and made fragile every image  
 that could contain the mind's exuberance.  
 These influences crossed, when empire married  
 the vision of one God of all the nations, 760  
 Architect of the mind, as of the world.  
 Under the widespread cloak of Christian empire,  
 the Latin of a universal reign,  
 dogma might seek to subjugate the mind,  
 but still the leaven of those founding visions  
 worked on, so that from time to time the staff  
 of hegemony once again became  
 the banner of revolt, the mind reverting  
 from doctrine's tameness to wild consequence.  
 In Europe, too, the merchant class was strong, 770  
 could bargain with the princes for its freedom,  
 and in its eyes the world was weighed and measured,  
 reduced from the integrity of form  
 to numbered and negotiable value  
 for even trade, excluding force or falsehood –  
 the coin, like Latin, being a word as good  
 in London as in Rome; and some dare think  
 this quantitative sovereignty of coin  
 instructed the deliberating mind  
 that wondered at the motions of the stars, 780  
 the fall of objects toward the attracting earth,  
 and showed the world how truth concerning these  
 might be attained, by severing from substance  
 image and quality, henceforth mere shades.  
 The method: from the object's iridescence  
 that beckons still with thousandfold appeal  
 to sense and soul, select those aspects which

are numerable; next, among those aspects  
surmise a mathematical relation  
with consequences which experiment 790  
can show; perform the experiment; observe;  
change the conditions, and observe again,  
measuring the results, each time, in numbers;  
use the confirmed surmise as fact, and lay  
thereon a fresh course of surmise and proof.  
Whatever has been ascertained this way  
is proof against the whisperings of magic,  
the dream's delusion, and the eye's deceit,  
and, surely as the moon and sun appear  
at their appointed times on the horizon, 800  
its truth will shine for any open eye.  
Technology and Reason thus at last  
were joined. The seed of scientific method,  
ancestor of a new world of design,  
was in the earth, and waited for the season  
of need and opportunity to unfold.

All weathers had been gathering toward that season  
since first into the northern forests, home  
to hunting clans, the fields began to creep,  
trees being felled to clear them and to warm 810  
the tillers of the soil, who then increased  
from lonely outposts where the axe's ring,  
the sound of human voices, scarcely broke  
the silence of the forest, to loud towns  
girt with wide townships where the earth was turned  
with heavy blades behind the collared horse.  
For centuries the woodsmen hewed, the hearths  
blazed blithely, while the trades went plodding on  
with what they had inherited, now and then  
patching contrivance from a traveler's tale, 820  
rarely inventing. Till amid that landscape  
thundered the first report of louder war:  
Gunpowder! which from iron barrels flung  
missiles no castle wall could stand against.  
Then war's inexorable law, that makes  
invention father of necessity,  
placed orders for the casting of the cannon,  
the digging of the iron, and the heat  
of furnaces to melt the stubborn ore.

The trees were thinned, the winter winds blew cold. 830  
 They turned then to the stone that burns, the remnant  
 of ancient life, pressed by the rock of aeons.  
 They dug it where it jutted from the slope  
 of hill or cut of valley, and they drove  
 the tunnels deeper, till the waters gathered  
 beneath their picks, and then they pumped the water  
 until at last an engine was invented  
 that pumped by steam instead of human strength,  
 first of the servants whose inanimate host  
 now throngs to wait upon us everywhere. 840  
 New uses for new powers were devised,  
 and all used coal, and coal called for more iron,  
 and iron for more coal. And this was merely  
 one strand in the thick rope that drew us on  
 since cannon felled the castles and dispersed  
 a feudal order that had fixed the stations  
 of lord and clerk and peasant, under heavens  
 ranked in scholastic clarities up to  
 the ultimate crystalline, which Galileo's  
 and Kepler's reasons shattered. Presently 850  
 revolt was waged against the single church  
 by skeptic thought and singular ambition  
 lifting the weight of custom from the mind,  
 and as it were a fresh wind blowing off  
 an endless ocean of discovery  
 that made explorers, merchants hoist their sails  
 and no-less-daring mind lift up its spyglass.  
 Not greed alone, but generosity  
 the new-found treasures of the world inspired,  
 for knowledge and the use of knowledge was 860  
 to those whose eager eyes could seek it out,  
 whatever be their heritage or habit.  
 Stirred by a faith in human mind, the people  
 rose up against a tutelage outgrown.  
 They severed rule from birth, awarded rule  
 to whoso might persuade them – as they hoped,  
 by the voice of reason and beneficence –  
 and claimed as right a share in this world's goods  
 no less than in the councils of the nations.  
 And this claim, in its turn, then worked a change 870  
 in the nature of the manufactured thing.  
 Between the attributes of poverty –

the linsey cloth, the spoon of horn, the bowl,  
 table and stool rough-hewn by kindred hands,  
 worn down by generations' daily use  
 to the consoling shape of the familiar—  
 and those dear-bought felicities of brocade,  
 porcelain and parquet and cabinetwork,  
 that set the gem of wealth and formed the pride  
 of craftsmen lingering over their designs, 880  
 giving each thing uniqueness, like a soul,  
 a space now gaped to be filled up with objects  
 stamped with resemblance to the things of wealth,  
 one pattern making many, at demand  
 greater than gradual skill could satisfy,  
 wrought out by clacking arms that could not weave  
 a maker's joy into the unsubtle texture.  
 That weft absorbed only the wasting flesh  
 of human beings, soon thrust down to serve  
 the mechanic servants conjured by their kind; 890  
 for profit's legion, loud with freedom's cry,  
 soon proved that it could be as hard a master  
 as any dandy king with all his court.  
 The goods thus made to furnish middle wealth  
 and general demand, called for the craft  
 of marketing: for buyers, like the goods,  
 fashioned after a pattern, with built-in  
 insatiability tending to discard  
 last season's goods for next, like food ingested  
 and then excreted without having nourished. 900  
 Again as in that immemorial hour,  
 so recent by the universe's watch,  
 when without thought of what would follow after  
 the first wild beast was led to fold, the first  
 seed was cast with purpose, we had found  
 another breach in the encircling wall  
 of creatural limitation, and poured through,  
 and in the rush of access to new power  
 thought we had come into a land of plenty  
 perpetual as the motion of our wheels 910  
 (we had just had it proved) could never be.  
 The way a star in burning fuses first  
 to helium its original hydrogen  
 and only at the end of its long span  
 fuses the helium to heavier atoms



and these to heavier still, with every stage  
briefer than the preceding, till the core  
is iron, and the star flares out and dies,  
even so combustion in our hands has run  
through all it could take hold of on this earth. 920  
Through unrecorded ages we were warmed  
by wood that clad the surface of the planet  
and seemed, like air and water, given forever,  
fetched with the simple axe from nearby groves.  
When wood grew scarce we dug the buried forests  
of coal with toil and danger in the mines,  
thinking this too would last forever, though  
the rocks of earth hold no more energy  
than the sun gives in a few seasons' growth.  
For a few centuries we pursued the seams 930  
further into the hill with greater strain  
and more elaborate engines. Then we pierced  
down deep into the planet and drew up  
petroleum, ooze of animal decay  
on ancient ocean floors imprisoned long  
in most occulted subterranean cisterns,  
rarely betrayed by seepage at the surface,  
more often found by the shrewd guess of those  
who map the earth's encrypted history  
from dip and sequence of outcropping rocks 940  
and guide the daring speculative thrust  
of drill and rig and pump, that sometimes strikes  
the fountain of dark wealth, sometimes dry ruin.  
Found, it is not yet fit for human use  
like wood or coal, but first must be refined,  
broken into the fractions that will serve  
our purposes, which yet it multiplies,  
for swiftly from the black protean liquid  
the furnishings of a new world were conjured,  
brave with all colors of prosperity. 950  
Petroleum was spun to shimmering cloth;  
moulded to toys, vessels and implements  
for every use, that almost seemed to be  
marble or glass, metal or rich-grained wood,  
poured on the field our increase had depleted  
that the old life might fertilize the new.  
Oil filled our mouths, and still more mouths were  
opened,

the sea's floor drilled at peril to its life  
as the reserves beneath the land were drained;  
rivers and lakes and coastal waters stank 960  
with factory wastes, the nets were drawn up empty.  
A century long we squandered this resource, 960  
and now the earth-drawn sap begins to ebb,  
the metals and the minerals are mined  
from which we shaped the vessels of its use  
and are in many places found no more.  
A thought of thrift now paces on the globe,  
taking stock of resources, reckoning  
how many centuries, decades, years, the stores 970  
of this or that will hold, pondering how  
to keep the engines working and the house  
of industry repaired, lest it collapse,  
burying the human masses in its ruins,  
leaving perhaps a remnant to start over  
in a world plundered bare of all that nourished  
our slow-devising ancestors, or else  
to wander listlessly and let life go.

Yet fear, and thrift which it would bring, are dogged,  
always, by faith that whatsoever the need,  
the wild demand, our ingenuity 980  
will find a way, and earth at last provide,  
or if not earth, the universe at large,  
which we with technologic might will open.  
Beyond the last reserve of fossil fuels,  
beyond the doubtful promise of the sunlight  
to do more than the all that it has done  
for life, there is the force that binds the atom,  
the primal bond of matter. Break it, and  
such energy's released as we have seen 990  
lit in instantaneous holocaust  
over Alamagordo, Hiroshima,  
and since then more terrific weapons still  
have been devised, greater destruction waits  
within a thousand missiles poised and ready  
to hurl upon all life the ultimate bane  
if anger and retaliation press  
the mechanism that could set them flying —  
such the first use to which the hand that seized  
the cosmic power put it. Yet we hope

that we can warm our hands even at this fire; 1000  
 that, tamed by layers of lead, the fast-escaping  
 particles will not strike the living cells  
 of those that freed them, and implant the seed  
 that comes up in the rising generation  
 as hideous deformity and death.  
 We hope our shieldings also will be proof  
 against mistake, malice, and *acte gratuit*,  
 and the enormous energy alone  
 be ours, to heat our homes and cook our food  
 in peace, although the ash must be inurned 1010  
 longer than Cheops' mummy, till the last  
 malignant force that glows in it is spent.  
 Yet this is not our last resort; a greater  
 and a more comfortable hope is ours,  
 since atoms may be fused as well as broken,  
 although at temperatures no earthly matter  
 withstands, for this is of the solar fire.  
 In a magnetic field's encircling grip  
 we have now learned to make a minute sun  
 explode, leaving no ash, no slightest sleeve 1020  
 singed. Moreover there's an isotope  
 of helium will wasteless fuse, and this  
 our neighbor Moon may lend us, or the huge  
 gaseous globe that circles beyond Mars.  
 Assuming all the thousand problems solved  
 to make this profitable – and, above all,  
 no sabotage or warfare on the moon –  
 within a generation, two at most,  
 we may inherit power which would be  
 to all human intents and purposes 1030  
 infinite; we would come into a plenty  
 perpetual, after all. As for the shortage  
 of those materials which we require  
 for tasks that every hour proliferate,  
 we have but just begun to show the wonders  
 of metamorphosis and making-do:  
 composite fibers, graphite, glass, and resin,  
 stand in for dwindling metals at low heat;  
 ceramics, finely sintered, will conduct  
 electric current; concrete, thinned, becomes 1040  
 a ship's hull. Then what bounds can matter set us  
 who have the laser-beam, the microchip,

those huge arenas where the nano-mote  
is battered into smaller smithereens,  
those immaterial scalpels that can cut  
into the very core of generation—  
What could the universe withhold from us  
which we propose to do?

So we must think  
if we are to remain what we have been.  
We are—for six days of the week, if not 1050  
for seven—the creatures that devise solutions  
from which new complications rise each time  
more vast and dense, requiring keener skill  
to solve them, and so on. To this we owe  
much of ourselves; in this the ingenious find  
a great delight, while those who can but stare  
uncomprehending at these mighty works  
yet by their very awe participate,  
as once perhaps Egyptian peasants gazed  
on Cheops' tomb, and felt its grandeur theirs. 1060  
Since first the soil was broken for our needs,  
not much has held against the forward motion  
material demand and mental quest  
keep up, like racing stallions yoked together,  
our numbers multiplying with our needs—  
and yet earth holds us, and there is a limit.  
Upon the gravity of earth our frames  
are predicated, every bone and muscle,  
and though we slip it for a month, or six,  
or simulate it somewhere, for a few, 1070  
we have no other home; and that home has  
but so much mass and surface, though we coin  
from every inch and ounce its ultimate use.  
No promise of a future infinite  
deceives our present sense that we are foundering  
in our own waste; our social systems, built  
upon our nerves' terrestrial foundation,  
crack with the weight of numbers and the strain  
of every function raised to the nth power,  
and now upon them rests the very sky, 1080  
the ozone layer our chemicals untile,  
while vapors thickened from our engines' fumes  
hold in the heat that melts the glacial poles  
and abrogates the climates that had fostered

our cultures, while the sap of life is sought  
vainly in many a land from brassy skies  
or comes polluted from the shrinking springs.  
And though frontiers of matter shift, we know  
that we have reached a limit in the mind  
beyond which we cannot advance, and still 1090  
remain the selves that recognize ourselves.  
To all directions lured, we have exceeded  
the intellect's capacity to make  
a whole of what it gains, to oversee  
the workings-out of thought, now more and more  
entrusted to those artificial minds  
whose calculation, widening out beyond  
its own deviser's guess, dwarfs human judgment  
and turns our knowledge back to the unknown.  
As the circumference of experiment 1100  
expands, expands, the neighboring researcher  
is out of call, while somewhere in the middle  
the citizen, the creature, waits in vain  
for word. Our fate has grown so like that story  
of a tower built toward heaven, then abandoned  
because the workers' tongues became confused,  
that we must wonder what in ancient times  
inspired that vision, so much more like us  
than anything that was. The signature  
it seems of prescient and far-traveled doubt, 1110  
the whispering of a half-heard voice confirmed.  
It is that voice that calls on us to check  
the very outward push of human time,  
the motion of a wave that, from a stone  
dropped once into the middle of the cistern,  
has traveled till it clashes with the brim,  
and now must seek the center once again.

## Chapter 7

*Recent responses to the ecological crisis. The '60's "counter-culture" and the movements of the '70's; their failure to create a viable alternative to techno-capitalism; the relapse into cynicism. Reinforcement of cynicism by Darwinistic arguments. A Darwinistic review of gender and economic relations and the "evolution" of previous social and religious counter-movements. Terror and techno-capitalism. Destruction of the biosphere as inevitable outcome of deterministic forces.*

This crossroads at which humankind now stands,  
this instant in the great year of creation,  
will be remembered, if the future ages  
are tenanted by human memory still,  
as humankind's breath-stop of recognition,  
wherein necessity clashed with itself,  
the drive within against the world without,  
and Thought, born of collision, strove to hold  
itself aloft and to command those waves.  
The world which we had changed commanded us           10  
to change ourselves, yet with no time for synapse  
and sinew to remold their form of matter  
by the ancient patient ways of evolution,  
but vision forced itself into the eye  
and riddles called for more than human mind  
to solve them, to dissolve and to reknit  
accordingly our pattern of response;  
and mortal flesh and mind of mortal flesh  
responded and rebelled, response, rebellion  
almost beyond discerning intertwined.                   20  
And who could tell us how to rise to this  
occasion? who could teach us what the graceful  
gestures are, or point out the right path  
amid the surface tangle of our landscape,  
inventions, institutions, and ideas  
so snarled in paradox?  
  Perhaps no teacher  
could come save trial and error, though the cost  
of errors mounts up till it almost threatens  
to price another trial out of sight.  
With the most recent trial we must begin,               30  
the experiment which living eyes have witnessed,

though eyes and witnesses deceive and though  
the mind secretes its rationalizing acids  
to break the lessons down, assimilate them  
to what we are and wish to go on being.  
Misgiving mounts in me upon the threshold  
of this inquest; yet certain it appears  
that if we do not thoroughly understand  
what has occurred and how, and for what reason,  
we shall but lend our wishes for a mask 40  
to that which comes upon us to destroy.  
Then let us see, if seeing can be borne.  
Shine, distant Earth, to show these things aright!  
And, Will-to-Life that lives within us still  
give us the strength to tabulate the results  
of these experiments, to hopeful purpose!

More than two generations now have faded  
since all across the nation then most rich  
in comforts and inventions, it appeared  
as though somewhere an alarm had started ringing 50  
and many rose to do, inventing each  
their own response, or joined to others' seeking,  
all sharing in a sense that human life  
could not go on as it had heretofore.  
Was it the fear of nuclear fire, the fear  
of water, earth and air forever tainted,  
poisoning even the mercy of the rain,  
the milk from mother's breast? Was it the tears  
and blood of the oppressed, seeping at last  
under the sealed door of upholstered comfort, 60  
perhaps through the antennae, into rooms  
unused as yet to sight of them? Who knows.  
At any rate the sign of peace was drawn,  
the family of man proclaimed. Across  
a nation lately won from hunting tribes  
helpless against the arms of Europe, surged  
a new kind of repentance. Multitudes  
fought against war with placard and parade,  
while individuals stood forth for peace,  
refusing to bear arms, throwing their bodies 70  
into the streets before the war-machines,  
or risked themselves to ride with the descendants  
of those their ancestors had brought in chains.

The flag of revolution that had passed  
 from insurrection on to insurrection  
 was raised again, the accusation sprayed  
 against the walls of state and corporation  
 as perpetrators of all crime and folly.  
 The young rose up against a social order  
 which, having brought them forth, bequeathed to them 80  
 a future like a polished poisoned fruit  
 while bidding them restrain themselves and build.  
 They spoke of love's fulfillment in the Now,  
 tore marriage down and stigmatized the contest  
 by which the right to nest and breed is won;  
 renouncing corporate cleverness, they tried  
 to bring the ancient ways of making back,  
 that pleased the fashioning hand and comforted  
 the eye with sight of labor comprehended.  
 The creeds that had led on and justified 90  
 their ancestors in conquest and invention –  
 the God of moral discipline and war,  
 the cult of Logic, Reason – they rejected,  
 seeking a mystic power to bind them back  
 to earth, or to the universal soul.  
 They sat in dreams before the shaman's fire,  
 revered the tribes their ancestors had slain,  
 bowed down before the teachers of the East,  
 chanted to drown the voice of conscious thought,  
 took drugs to thrust them wholly out of self 100  
 into another space, another time,  
 made songs that were like spells to change the world.  
 – The media, that served the corporate host  
 without whom the recruited children reckoned,  
 were on the scene almost before it started:  
 they with alacrity took up the tune  
 and piped it louder, piped it with a throb  
 of liberated ardor of destruction,  
 to drown the voices from without, within,  
 pleading a certain logic which the mind 110  
 is not at liberty to abrogate,  
 pleading that consciousness was ever twin  
 to conscience, that on judgment rests the cause  
 of the oppressed, that on commitments binding  
 tomorrow's impulse into last year's word  
 community, like all true love, is founded.



The physical destruction of the mind  
that came to some, must typify the end  
that came to all that carnival of dreams,  
felt by most revellers as an exhaustion  
of hope, a weariness of good intentions. 120

But toward the morning that broke gray and cold  
two further causes were announced: the first  
Ecology, heralded by that image  
with which the labor of this song began:  
our Earth, that must become one household now  
to shelter all the family of man.  
Those who throughout the 'sixties had gone barefoot,  
worn old clothes, made cooperative markets  
for vegetable food untouched by poisons, 130  
turned off the television, turned their backs  
on technical invention, tried to make  
of simple and discarded things a beauty  
that spoke of love for earth and humankind,  
were joined now by the scientist proclaiming  
earth's unity no mystic fiction merely,  
the natural world a web of such tight weave  
that action here is action everywhere  
and knowledge of the whole prerequisite  
for any intervention to be wise; 140  
figures and facts were marshaled to protest  
the tearing-out of precious illustrations  
from the slow-written volume of creation,  
clear-cutting and the filling up of marshes,  
this poison, that. And this and that was done.  
Environmental laws were passed, enforced,  
imperfect, yet where kept they served to keep  
some facet of the earth from devastation.  
Yet the chief aim was missed, and scarcely sighted:  
that wholeness begging to inspire a vast 150  
coherency of thought and plan and action  
to match and tame the momentum of destruction  
found no constructive, comprehensive answer.  
Therefore into the gap between great need  
and action's impotence, defiance crept,  
trailing new ostentation in its wake  
together with new lust for reckless power:  
the thought of walking humbly on the earth

soon passed, as if it were a freak of fashion.

The luck of thoughts – ill luck perhaps – would have it 160  
that at the same time entered one more cause  
whose name invokes division: the demand  
of women, that with sudden rage rose high  
above the voices of debate and song.  
Why this, why then?

It was not wholly new  
that women gathered to protest their lot;  
on many a graph of history are plotted  
dim insurrections the suppressing hand  
blotted till shape can scarcely be discerned;  
but of late decades that enlightened thought 170  
which made the individual mind the measure  
of truth and right, had favored women's claims,  
perhaps to compensate for consequences  
(by half-acknowledged premonition glimpsed)  
of System's tree outspreading as the factory  
wheels drowned out the spinning of the home:  
they had gained a voice in government, the right  
to study and to practice and to teach  
where for long centuries they had been excluded;  
they had man's hand in marriage, his support 180  
in keeping of the home and raising children,  
and for a shield from his strong arm the agreement  
that to impose one's will by force alone  
is not becoming to a rational being.  
These things they had, though in imperfect measure  
and poised upon contingencies which few  
seem then to have recalled. The voice that sounded  
deep in the small hours of the psychedelic  
Walpurgisnacht of dreams and wild ideas  
was not the voice of counsel but a whirlwind 190  
of vectors which the adversary had  
more hand in shaping than the dancers knew.  
There was the rhetoric of revolution,  
of liberation, of equality,  
that propagated a like lot for all,  
though none could prophesy what it might be,  
wanting to bulldoze down whatever stood  
before a plan was drawn for new construction,  
and that, having caught up races and classes

– distinctions accidental among men, 200  
 a matter of the final coat of paint  
 applied by evolution, or the dust  
 of recent history, birth, education –  
 now rolled on to demand utter effacement  
 of a distinction hinted in the first  
 haploid division of the ancestral cell.  
 And with this was entwined a hidden anger –  
 hidden because the human fears to own  
 rejection's wound, that calls for more rejection  
 from that in all of us which follows power – 210  
 arising from the breaking of men's troth,  
 the casting-out of constancy, on which  
 the home is built, by which the child is nourished,  
 lost in the ill redefinition of love,  
 in men's rejection of their fatherhood  
 in the name of freedom, from a yoke indeed  
 linked to the systems they now shied at entering,  
 but of all fetters easiest to break.  
 That wound in seeking to deny itself  
 issued a twisted outcry for more freedom 220  
 for more enjoyment without pledge or future,  
 letting the child's hand fall; they claimed the right,  
 since home no longer got a share of spoil,  
 to work – for the most part at the ill-rewarded  
 jobs that fall commonly to women's lot –  
 then to come home to children kept all day  
 by strangers, and the housework still to do,  
 as if they had petitioned for their wrong.  
 And this ill sorted with the myth that made  
 the rhetoric of this paradoxical movement: 230  
 that women as the mothers of the race,  
 less heir than men to the aggressive drives  
 that built and power the car in which we sit  
 aimed at the clearly-sighted cliff of doom,  
 might somehow lay a hand upon the wheel  
 and steer us from the brink.

This theme was sung  
 a half-tone down in many a lament  
 where the lamenter saw herself as Nature  
 spoiled, desecrated by men's violent greed;  
 though to proclaim oneself a victim means 240  
 not always to evince a saving wisdom.

Nor could the role of Wisdom be assumed  
 without acknowledging inherent difference  
 that seemed to split the human mind in two  
 and often had been used in ages past  
 as rationale for women's subjugation;  
 so they felt obligated to proclaim  
 all difference mere artefact of custom,  
 and each one free to self-transform at will.

No one bent to the task of laying out 250  
 the twin truths of necessity and freedom  
 so that each one subtends its right domain;  
 the countercultural mistrust of mind  
 mingled with the primordial or acquired  
 mistrust of women's mind specifically,  
 which seems, internalized, to make it hard  
 for women to assist each other's thought  
 except in ways of mutual suppression.  
 So ideologies of mindlessness

entered, tricked out in academic jargon, 260  
 that narrowed woman's province to the body,  
 supine, despoiled of home and shorn of child,  
 and headless as misogyny could wish.  
 Here and there it was urged that the estate  
 of woman lies in kinship and relation;  
 some cast the thought of networks reaching wide  
 or, pointing to the structures of the brain  
 that can, it seems, identify the sexes,  
 ascribed to womankind a global thinking

as answer to the questions baffling men. 270  
 Here indeed was a field where ignorant armies  
 clashed by night: a field this time extending  
 from street and office into home and heart.  
 The accusation of the world came home  
 from criticizing leaders at a distance  
 to call for alterations in behavior,  
 in the minute detail of speech and gesture,  
 in my relations with the present Thou.

Among the obscure melee what stubborn struggle 280  
 in many a human soul; what insights glimpsed  
 and then obscured; what covenants and betrayals;  
 what strange prismatic visions of new worlds,  
 what novelties of conscience, that soon faded.  
 For though the probing knife had touched the nerve

of ancient habit and prerogative,  
no spirit of integrity presided  
which might have clarified what must be done  
and given courage for it; in its stead  
those couriers whose object is to stir  
their listeners to aimless violent feeling, 290  
as at some combat they will pay to watch,  
relayed and mocked the challenge, then presided  
with glee over the carnage that ensued.  
For when from dark defeat woman and man  
rose to resume the old as best they could,  
they found the old was innocent no more.  
Though privilege be reseated in its place  
and more, swollen with spoil of the defeated,  
the wound to self-esteem still festered on;  
the sense of right was lost, and that self-love 300  
which hopes for the approval of the kind –  
losses which man avenged on woman's image  
and, all too often, on her person too;  
the children, who had no voice in the quarrel,  
compelled no less to share its fruits, endure  
what ultimate loss of mercy can inflict:  
before us to a dark horizon stretch  
the furrows of the future sown with salt!

In this debacle of mind and heart, the cockcrow  
sounded for other good intentions too. 310  
The hopeful songs fell silent. One by one  
those who had worked at trying to right wrongs  
woke to futility, picked themselves up,  
walked back to catch the trains they had stepped off  
for where they might again obtain the portion  
of corporate power they once had pushed away.  
Not joyfully they went. Loud music sounded  
in which no words of hope were interwoven,  
whose only purpose was to shout down thought  
in the off-hours; many sought devastation 320  
in drugs from which long since no visions came,  
self-loss the penance for a false self-gain,  
or schooled themselves in cruelty to purge  
self-hatred and the thought of being a puppet,  
till human agony is produced, sold,  
and bought, a commodity like any other.

Such was the end of all those brave intentions.  
All of those revolutions now appear  
the strugglings of an animal caught in quicksand  
that only serve to sink it deeper in, 330  
a liquidation-sale of all our values,  
the self-annunciation of all ill  
which first used our remaining good as mask  
that now lies shredded while it stands revealed.  
Not that the movements altogether died:  
a few persist, the warners and the helpers  
in this or that field of concern, the ones  
who still as confidently prophesy  
of a new age, as forty years ago,  
and in the self-same words, barely affected 340  
by the great refutation of events;  
but these are voices that are growing weaker –  
nor shall their silence afterwards be heard:  
so prophesies the spirit of this hour.

This twilight and collapse of our ideals  
occurred to the accompaniment of reasons  
authoritative science had produced  
to show that an irrevocable law  
condemns us just to this, without appeal.  
It was not altogether like that earlier 350  
version in which “survival of the fittest”  
came arm-linked with a dream of national glory  
which in the coming-true proved stupefying  
abomination of desolation only –  
its mate this time was undisguised Despair;  
it came not to officiate at some  
lurid cultic scene in turgid sputterings  
mounting with fumes of beer and smoke of torches,  
but lucidly to lecture, well provided  
with charts and figures by statistical 360  
procedure purged of bias and of chance,  
in seemingly-dispassionate voice that gathered  
confirmation from the echoing thunder  
of outward happening, from the obscure  
urge or ill premonition of the heart,  
so that, indeed, we could not choose but hear;  
and those who sought to question and correct  
the findings, brought what they themselves had found,

and lo, it fit; till on the lowered screen  
 the data, overlaid, formed a composite 370  
 picture of how the human mind acquired  
 its form, and what in consequence it is,  
 this instrument with which we now are trying  
 to think our freedom and project a future.  
 Then it was that we saw in time-stopped sequence  
 the germination of the creatural mind  
 in the innumerable minute adjustments  
 that helped the organism to carry forward  
 the undeciphered message that composes  
 its couriers throughout the generations. 380  
 In the course of this odyssey, we heard,  
 the mind was bifurcated, male and female,  
 each half with its own habits and desires,  
 yet lending to the other of itself.  
 The blueprint of the asymmetry was shown  
 in generative organs that prescribe  
 aggression on the one side, cautious flight  
 on the other, whereby strength is proved and chosen;  
 in the one, constant and promiscuous search  
 for fertile ground in which to scatter seed, 390  
 to multiply the offspring, that of many  
 a few may thrive to bear the sire's remembrance,  
 and then to fence the ground from other sowers,  
 as much as can be compassed and defended  
 by tactics of control and rival strife;  
 in the other, careful tending of the few  
 that in the single vessel slowly form,  
 alertness to their need, alertness likewise  
 to the behavior of the counterpart,  
 and stratagems to bind the mate, or others, 400  
 to partnership in labor that is always  
 constant, particular, and slow, and always  
 pregnant with loss, as with the future being.  
 And as the creature grows toward human stature,  
 so also the circumference of care  
 from the point of original conception  
 expands in space and time and social habit,  
 drawing a greater sustenance to itself.  
 This to provide, as well as to supply  
 their own immediate strength, the males with free 410  
 hands, and minds less trammled by constraint

of too-elaborate solicitude,  
devise the hunt: pursuit alike akin  
to sexual conquest and defeat of foes,  
for which they mass around their weaker kin.  
These needs decree a hierarchic peace  
among the rivals now confederate,  
minds that in unison conceive a plan  
implanted by one keen in calculation  
and acted on by all in calculating 420  
accord, as in accord they must divide  
the gain, and settle strife among themselves,  
for this constructing precedent and law;  
and law, together with fraternal love  
and loyalty to the leader who unites,  
form the three pillars of the haploid mind  
which must incline to think itself the whole.  
For there is a fourth pillar, wrapped in shadow,  
and that is animus toward those who bore them,  
whose domination is the more remembered 430  
as infantile dependence lengthens out—  
dependence on the very being that is  
to be controlled, as sexual fact prescribes;  
to be excluded, lest solicitude  
intrude between the arrow and the quarry,  
or intervene against loyal self-risk  
for the sake of all; to be at last converted  
into a token of exchange among  
their kin, a voiceless vessel of succession.  
Therefore the origin of man becomes 440  
a haunting shame, a scandal purged by jest,  
while that intelligence which taught the tongue  
its earlier word, that watchfulness which hedged  
the small steps trying to stagger beyond care  
and entertained the infant mind in bounds,  
are nameless in the annals of the clan,  
though here and there an artefact or custom,  
a shaman's dress, a tale of origin,  
seem evidence of bygone mother-right  
(whether that bygone ever was a Now 450  
or just an inborn phantom of the mind),  
and though from that forgetfulness upwell  
the spring of song, the source of love and play.  
The maintenance of this division seems



one of the primal purposes of culture,  
 that filtering screen which we have seen adorned  
 with carvings various as Babel's tongues,  
 but of a fundamental architecture  
 imprinted in the nerves on either side.  
 For, born to bear the young and to maintain 460  
 the little circle of a fostering peace,  
 the bearer mainly learns to tread the maze  
 of the possessor's mind: a knowledge given  
 through instinct, isolate experience,  
 the whisperings of those confined together,  
 the implications of a children's story,  
 unspoken understandings, and example  
 conveyed in what appears mere idle gossip.  
 Laws are not made here, though they may be kept  
 or else covertly improvised against; 470  
 here loyalties divide beneath the pressure  
 of the more powerful, whom each alone  
 must court in competition with the rest,  
 and who is watchful to crush down the signs  
 of such autonomously concerted action  
 as might disturb control's prerogative;  
 so each will quickly loosen any tie  
 that links her to one lost by too much daring.  
 Here leadership and systematic thought  
 cannot arise; and yet the tribal life 480  
 could not be whole, it would not hold together,  
 were not the hierarchic drive, the forward  
 unity of command and legislation,  
 subtended by an inconspicuous  
 weaving of awareness and perception,  
 anarchic seemingly, yet unified  
 into a global knowledge focusing  
 on the moment's reaction and decision  
 made in the total light of all relations  
 that bear unnamed upon the moment's point 490  
 to rescue what harsh principle would rend.  
 And these two modes of thinking are embodied  
 not only severally in the sexes;  
 for every human brain of either gender,  
 however swayed by one mode, yet contains  
 the other mode in shadowed operation,  
 the lattice has interstices, there is

a narrow bridge between the mind's two halves,  
or, mutually mute, the halves were doubtless  
inviolate; but yet the commissure 500  
is tenuous, as between the sexes, so  
between the modes even in the single mind,  
as intuition wrestles with conviction  
and is itself with dark impulse confused.

And clearer grows this diagram of fate  
when we consider how the mind has been  
deformed through time beneath the press of numbers:  
how, when the tribes were welded in the cities,  
the mutual knowledge that had joined with law  
to equalize the members of the tribe 510  
and hold the strong in check, was dissipated,  
so that old Hierarchy rose again  
to bind the strangers, drawing to itself  
the Law, now more and more its instrument,  
and thus emerged the structure of the State  
which, tested, bore the weight of pyramid  
and ziggurat, command upon command,  
court, clerkship, army, priesthood, all locked in  
beneath one figure of authority  
who symbolized a universal Power, 520  
Creator of the world as of the empire.  
The female power that had always been  
less tangible, less solidly acknowledged,  
was in proportion weakened as the extended  
root-systems of the family were torn up  
and faces hidden behind masks of place  
and the authority of riddling tales  
where conflict dreamed itself to resolution  
gave way to the hegemony of thought  
shaped to the need of monolithic rule, 530  
because the clash of state on state must favor  
the one most consequent in martial law,  
as within groups the most ruthless float atop  
by the upward sift of deference and threat.  
Yet after conquest nurture needs must follow  
to make the grass grow back on trampled ground;  
for lack of which, empires have swiftly towered  
and fallen almost as rapidly to ruin,  
too ruthless even to sustain themselves,

like wounded sharks devouring their own entrails. 540  
 But kingdoms lasted when among the columns  
 of power the moderating voice could filter  
 somehow, and weave its own sustaining pattern,  
 whether through public dignity accorded  
 to woman's image, if not to herself,  
 or through the founding of a realm of Art  
 where, though without authority, the Muse  
 might speak of what the laws could not acknowledge,  
 or else through softening of manners giving  
 a public imitation of the graces 550  
 of home, that now might or might not obtain  
 within a family sphere secured by custom.  
 By such allowances, such mitigations,  
 mind found a sheltered space in which to flourish  
 and hold a realm of possibility  
 open for the yet-undetermined act—  
 even for that dream of founding the accord  
 of common life on reason and on trust  
 which could in thought extend its brooding wings  
 over a world entire, although in practice 560  
 it was the sword bore it from place to place.  
 And if such future seems now of the past,  
 it is not only that, like some candescent  
 water-lily floating on bogwater,  
 the dream seemed ignorant of what bore it up,  
 but also that the world made and unmade  
 by the devices of the mind so formed  
 now threatens to unmake the mind itself.  
 More even than the exhaustion of resources,  
 the poisoning of earth, water and air, 570  
 there looms above our human diminution  
 this hypertrophy of the hierarchic  
 mode in thought and action, which occurs  
 in consequence of needs we must provide  
 at more and more removes, a lengthening chain.  
 When every home fetched its own wood and water  
 and every village had its skillful hands  
 to forge and weave and carve what was required  
 for rural life, then kings might rule afar  
 and nobles might oppress, but close to home 580  
 there was an independence of the person,  
 a space in which to think one's thoughts, and sing,

and speak one's mind, and recognize a friend –  
 or so we now imagine it, forgetting  
 what was perhaps a brutish feudal dark  
 from which we sought to free the miserable  
 by progress equal to enlightenment,  
 twinned as were its beginnings to rebellion  
 against the ancient hieratic fetters  
 of church and sanctified autocracy 590  
 and their complicit myths. Newborn Invention  
 clamored for freedom to survey the world  
 with fearless eyes, untinted by old schemes.  
 Heedless of all traditional dress and bonds,  
 the mind Invention hailed as principle  
 believed a common reason could enact  
 laws that would check the violent and the cunning  
 and make the world a place where every mind  
 might grow unfolding to its fullest flower –  
 a dream that floated long, a pretty rainbow, 600  
 on rivers flammable with industrial waste.  
 For with each road and pipe and wire and cable  
 that now supply what once lay close at hand,  
 another metal shoot of hierarchic  
 control enters the common earth and air.  
 It is the Company that brings the water  
 from distant dam, the heat from far-off mine,  
 the voice of kin from the antipodes  
 to which it sent him off to earn his bread  
 and plant another runner of its stem. 610  
 And as the organizations grow and join,  
 subsuming every enterprise they meet  
 (consumers will not stop them; see them still  
 shopping for what is shiniest and cheapest,  
 invisible the talismans of trust  
 relinquished with each coin they spend that way),  
 the hierarchy tends to come unstuck  
 from the community it once supported –  
 the family, the town, even the nation –  
 while government and law fall far behind, 620  
 dwarfed by complexity beyond provision,  
 entwined with what they struggle to restrain.  
 The people's needs become subordinate  
 to an autonomous impulse of expansion,  
 uncontrolled increase of control and profit

is paramount, and necessarily so,  
 for other such machines made out of men  
 watch to snap up missed opportunities.  
 They fashion men who cannot love themselves,  
 knowing by what means they have had to rise 630  
 far from the moderating eye of justice  
 or wisdom conscious of the needs of all.  
 Here human beings avoid each other's eyes  
 and hide their thoughts, knowing that no bond holds.  
 There is not much that they can tell their children,  
 so that a silence opens in the home,  
 but for this too the corporate mind has found  
 a cure: a box of noise and flickering shadows  
 to fill the vacant mind with vacancy  
 and hunger for what will not satisfy, 640  
 to make the home a marketplace, suborn  
 the vote, till none govern but by its leave.  
 And some upon the streets you see whose ears  
 are filled with whispering phones that come between  
 them and whatever thoughts they may have left,  
 next best thing to an electrode in the brain:  
 these are the peons of the system, those  
 its peers, who cease from song to build machines  
 that ape and over-ape the robotry  
 of human thought, when it is only this, 650  
 until invention with mad pride aspires  
 to fashion circuits that outmode the mind.  
 We know the harm; and yet the fascination  
 of gadgets grows; we crave them more than bread,  
 a craving that is in its final essence  
 a wish to fuse with hierarchic power  
 which, having gobbled up the rest of life,  
 now beckons with the sole remaining promise  
 of comfort – outward comfort – and survival.  
 So, it is said, a captive rat will press 660  
 the button that will shock its brain with pleasure  
 although food lie beside it, and it starve.  
 – How then shall creatural mind, so undermined  
 by the inane, take thought for the creation?

Such was the demonstration of events  
 which we observed to the diminuendo  
 of all our hopeful chants. As I review it,

the spirit of despair that argued then  
 and keeps this watch with me now leads me forth  
 and whispers gloating to my sense: "Observe, 670  
 you who have trusted in the universe,  
 the other provinces of earth, and see  
 how variously the selfsame fate prevails.  
 Not for the first time in your generation,  
 where plenty's momentary overflow  
 fostered the building of such airy castles  
 that crumbled when the Leviathan bedrock shifted  
 (the peasants of the Third World, ravaged bare  
 by locust corporations, could have told them),  
 did human beings insurgé appalled against 680  
 the social engine of their own destruction.  
 Look back: Landauer too, and Saint-Simon  
 had tried to shore against the mind's undoing  
 a family of thinkers and of workers,  
 a federation of communities,  
 fired with a deeper thought, a clearer passion  
 than through the hempsmoke of our time was seen—  
 who now recalls their names, to call on them?  
 Upon ideas, too, a natural  
 selection operates, retaining only 690  
 what sorts with the enormous schemes of might.  
 Like phantom suns Landauer and Saint-Simon  
 soon set, but one that rose between them long  
 beat coldly down upon the great Northeast.  
 It rose from the brain of one indignant man  
 sitting in a library and writing,  
 defining justice—as the opposite  
 of private profit battening on the worker,  
 whose bones he had observed being ground for bread.  
 Since this injustice was material 700  
 (and all ideas merely superstructure  
 upon a base that moves them and itself),  
 the contradiction had to have its motive  
 in economic mechanism, in  
 a force of matter raised to greater power.  
 A violent upheaval of the oppressed  
 he saw, and a dictatorship which would  
 endure until (by some causality  
 whose nature remained vague) it was to vanish,  
 leaving a world of brotherhood and peace. 710

Such was the intellectual Minotaur  
 begot on moral sense by tyrant-urge  
 reducing life to mere mechanic matter  
 and then exhorting matter to be just.  
 Another read him on that continent  
 Tatar and czar had broken to the knout  
 and saw, guessed what a reservoir of power  
 to weld the hungry and the envious,  
 the unthinking and the cruel into one,  
 lay in those formulae that rendered down 720  
 all human acts to economic laws;  
 of these he forged a doctrine, then a party,  
 and so by guile and force possessed the land.  
 Proclaiming itself just, that cause enticed  
 many whom wrongs of the oppressed had stirred  
 to hopeful joining, miserable end.  
 For soon enough the drapery of the ideal  
 fell from the will to power, personated  
 by one who knew one thing: to give commands  
 for murder and betrayal – word that found 730  
 the executioners ready. At its hiss  
 a thousand ears were opened in the cities,  
 the wood of human trust was tunneled through,  
 the prisons filled, amid Siberian snows  
 empires of endless agony were founded  
 while the workers toiled in serfdom to the state,  
 bricks for a vast and stupefying temple  
 towered above by one Cyclopean image,  
 like those of Ra or Marduk, that proclaimed  
 the final bleakness of material fact; 740  
 the block-like business suit bulked forth not flesh  
 but the advancing shoulders of the tanks  
 which the head on that thick neck could deploy,  
 that head, whose thoughts were copied in the heads  
 of those whom the desire of might alone  
 could move: the men of stone with lightless eyes.  
 Egypt and Babylon had risen again;  
 Mandelstamm saw their shadow, and from it  
 augured correctly of his own ill fate;  
 and the ill changes of the Caspian sea 750  
 will witness to impoverished generations  
 how nature fares beneath the heel of might.  
 To this the dream of Socialism, that

hope of restraining greed, recapturing  
the fruits of enterprise for the common weal  
evolved."

To which I answer: "That colossus  
fell, after all. While still its nightmare shape  
frightened the dreams of children, one fine morning  
it was not there. For, evil as it was,  
it needed still the dream of common good 760

to hold itself together. It dispersed  
as soon as bribery and intimidation  
had clogged its arteries, rusted its joints  
from bending mind and arm to feed itself..."

To this the interlocutor supplies:  
"...and left it prey to international commerce.  
Compulsion toward the common good was worsted  
by liberty of plunder; which, relieved  
from competition that had given it  
a sort of conscience, grows more impudent, 770  
discards all pretense of beneficence.

And are the precincts and the temples built  
by liberty of plunder more appealing?  
See a vast landscape made of screaming signs,  
see these enormous glass and concrete cartons,  
empty of images. There are no leaders  
here, only winners, less and less inclined  
to share the take, or tell you who they are.  
They are no one. It is a mindless process

that's in control, churning out stimuli 780  
to hypnotize, setting the treadmill's pace  
a little faster every year, to leave  
less and less space for thought of human fate,  
careless of its own future. For when all  
the world is beggared and the cupboard bare,  
it must consume itself. Yet till that moment  
immediate self-interest will keep on

stoking the engine of this prosperous ruin,  
as upon Easter Island where the forests  
of palms that had provided food and shelter 790  
and the sea-freedom of the long canoes  
were felled, to the last tree they might have saved  
to seed regrowth. No common wisdom grew  
an arm with strength to lay a hand upon  
the arm that swung the axe, to hold it back.



Then war and famine thinned them to a remnant  
scuttling about between the caves in which  
they hid from one another underneath  
the heaven-turned gaze of those huge monuments  
to their stupidity."

The pointing arm 800  
swings now to where around that inward-reaching  
arm of earth's main three continents confer.

"Observe," it says, "this petrie-dish of cultures,  
where, laboring amid the press of war,  
trade and migration, humankind brought forth  
the largest and most varied brood of gods  
and called most loudly on them to deliver  
some vision that could save it from itself.

These visions, too, evolved. Consider first 810  
the father of all protests and attempts

to drive a wedge in Time: that spirit's thought  
which once between the massive force of Babel  
and that of Egypt, sprouted, pried a space,  
a Sabbath in the struggle for existence,  
in which a human freedom seemed to grow,  
sustained by vision of a power beyond  
the grasp of man, beyond the universe  
which it created and by will upholds,  
addressing humans, who can hear its voice,

in the language of command, which if obeyed 820  
would turn them from the path of unpurged impulse  
leading toward death, onto the path of life,  
a higher life of consciousness and choice.

You, whom the universe has now confronted,  
may strain to catch the echo of that thunder,  
which seemed to have died away, becoming louder  
again; but what it said you will not catch;  
you hear the old imperatives of the tribe  
fused with a hint of universal law

perhaps in this one tribe to be revealed. 830

As in some small and isolate population  
mutations first appear and propagate  
till a configuration of new species  
has taken shape, then to be spread abroad,  
so from the solitude of that one people  
much thought has radiated, although not  
the Law as manifest in dual shape

throughout that people's youth: there were the rules  
 given in perpetuity to maintain  
 the common life within a stable frame, 840  
 and there was inspiration that revealed  
 the right act, in the unrepeated moment,  
 to prophets whom the hand of spirit chose.  
 This dual Law-and-Teaching, for a while,  
 propped the nation up against great odds  
 which had their way at last. The empires came  
 and razed its temple and its holy city;  
 wave after towering wave of suffering washed  
 over the people, till their feverish spirit  
 began to toss with visions of the end, 850  
 conceive apocalypse and anarchy.  
 Their sages, still desiring to prolong  
 the people's life in the world as it is,  
 stopped up the wellsprings of immediate song,  
 winnowed the sacred books and sealed the canon,  
 commanded inspiration now to trickle  
 through intricate channels of interpretation  
 and deference to elder precedent:  
 manifestation of supernal being  
 was distanced to a memory that grew 860  
 dimmer and dimmer through the generations,  
 brought now, it too, beneath the universal  
 scepter of inexorable decay.  
 Under the shadow of Time the people's soul  
 sighed for deliverance, and their wishful thought  
 conceived the shape of an anointed King  
 who would tread down the kings who trod them down.  
 Out of that expectation stepped a man  
 – stepped many a man, for that great role is written  
 upon the clouds, and will precipitate – 870  
 but one man in particular.

Not from

the soil and seed of Israel alone  
 he grew, but out of many strands that crossed  
 within that matrix. Follow, now, the Greeks,  
 whose city-states have left an after-image  
 of civic dignity that was the setting  
 for the dignity of individual person.  
 The gods to whom they built their columned temples,  
 whose forms they shaped in more than living stone,

were natural forces that had taken on 880  
a human shape and human faculties  
in their imagination, entering in  
to dialogue and common consciousness,  
though still capricious, like those human forces  
of war, dissension, tyranny, that doomed  
the polis. Yet even as this tragedy  
proceeded, to their philosophic thought  
the shapes of gods dissolved into the mind  
that knew itself as causal principle  
and posited an ultimate Mind and Cause 890  
beyond appearance and contingency,  
the source of freedom from brute force and passion  
and of the power to see the good and choose it—  
perhaps, indeed, some influence had found  
the way from Sinai to that other haven.  
This faith, whose temple was the academy,  
whose creed still drapes our schools, enshrined a vision  
of Beauty, Truth, and Good inseparable,  
a logic-word inherent in the mind  
as in the world, whereby the human being, 900  
instructed and in-formed by wisdom, knew  
the self as model of an ordered world,  
citizen of the cosmos, subject only  
to cosmic laws they thought they could deduce  
as by straight lines and circles drawn in sand.  
This enterprise they prosecuted while  
a king whom a philosopher had tutored,  
and who perhaps had gathered from such teaching  
a supplemental glory to surround  
a head that burned in the focus of that gaze 910  
men turn upon a chief in adoration,  
exploded in a fireball of conquest  
upon whose wind of devastation floated,  
strangely, a vision of Cosmopolis  
which in war's wake precipitated cities  
and left behind an apparatus which  
became foundation for another empire  
built by a rigorous ambitious people  
who gained a world but lost their civic soul  
to profiteering, luxury, the vices 920  
of power, and the people's degradation  
in spectacles whose cruelty deflected

the rage of the degraded. Through all this,  
philosophers pursued the shade of Good.  
Austere, abstract, they scorned the aid of poets,  
their pageantry of images deluding  
with semblances of things, their rhythms pulsing  
to raise the fumes of passion that becloud  
the clear bright flame of reason. Yet with words  
detached from the poetic tree they failed  
to tame the great beast. For the tyrant's mouth 930  
spat out the curb of Reason, while the people  
went from the banquet of philosophy  
still hungry for the pageantry, the rhythms,  
the food of the delirium that gathers  
mind from the icy solitude of thought  
into the social body's heat. That need  
kept bodying itself forth, extruding forms  
of mystery and sect with doctrines merging  
myth and philosophy, promising freedom,  
worshipping many a god in mutilated 940  
figure whose resurrection then betokened  
release from circles of vicissitude  
into a realm of fellowship and light.  
Magic and fraud were mixed with mutual aid  
and gleams, at times, of that aspiring vision  
which, penetrating masks of difference,  
perceives all gods as facets of the One.

“Two masses, then, of suffering and desire,  
the inheritance of Sinai and of Athens,  
met, merged, and flashed. And in that flash appeared 950  
a shape that wore the mantle of the national  
deliverer on the shoulders of the god  
who dies with us to draw us into light  
and on those two roles overlaid a third,  
the role of teacher who had walked on earth  
and left a wisdom-trail for us to follow,  
and yet a fourth: the cosmic Word itself,  
from which the teachings to all teachers flow.  
And now the resurrection's great escape  
holds up an apparition of true life 960  
beyond all grasp of empire and of law,  
trumpeting forth a universal love  
as from a generosity of soul

that cannot die. Soon toward that blinding light,  
whether it was indeed a shining-forth  
from the eternal, or one more combustion  
of exhalations over the endless swamp  
Mortal Fatuity, the souls were drawn,  
until a soldier saw that in that sign  
an earthly victory could be won as well 970  
(though by great sins, at last to be forgiven).

That figure seemed to magnetize the world.  
The people found a comforter and teacher,  
a symbol of their suffering and hope;  
the emperors an image they could use  
to hold the people's loyalty, and quash  
the exuberance of anarchic fantasy,  
and on religious pretext to cast down  
the trouble-making nation Israel.

While in the highest tiers of intellect 980  
philosophy mutated into dogma,  
the streets began to seethe with mobs incited  
to demonstrate the truth of their religion  
by smashing rival shrines and images,  
burning papyrus, striking down whoever  
stood up in contradiction. So the splendors  
of Phidias lapsed back into the past;  
immortal staves of Sophocles and Sappho  
confided in the flames and were effaced.

"Such sacrifices of the intellect  
could not arrest, indeed perhaps assisted 990  
the dissolution of Cosmopolis,  
repressing thought when thought was needed most,  
while pious fraud, to which the evidence  
of spirit is not strong enough unaided,  
added ingredients to corruption's stew.  
The realm of Rome fell to tripartite fate.

Eastward a pious emperor's rigid code  
founded a churchly state whose frozen pattern  
of precedent and pageant could persist  
a thousand years until at last effaced 1000  
by the all-dissolving power of the south;  
while in the west the empire's roads were cut,  
the arts of civilization were unlearned.  
In feudal darkness under local lords,

preached to by an hysteric Church that fed them  
on otherworldly dreams, the people dwindled  
and lived in expectation of the end  
and only after centuries revived,  
relearned, fused fiefs to nations, reconciled,  
unsteadily, the profitable endeavor 1010  
of thinking with the reign of that great Prince  
in whose name deeds of love and hate were done,  
according as immortal certitude  
or mortal impulse grasped that wavering flag.  
But that uneasy fusion's seams enlarged  
to flaws, until in course of time it crumbled.  
For though the mighty conquered in its sign,  
the final approbation of its legend  
could never rest on deeds of force; and this  
lit in the given-to-force a wrath that smoldered 1020  
till in a land once conquered by the sword  
for the Prince of Peace, that wrath flared out in worship  
of violent impulse for its own fell sake;  
and though its minions there were beaten down,  
those flames spring elsewhere up beneath the feet.  
And this crack joins another: the reliance  
on too much contrary to fact, or to  
those reasons that are now received as truth.  
Tertullian believed because absurd  
and contradictory to all the iron 1030  
laws of the world, whose clench he doubtless felt,  
the incarnation and the resurrection;  
but the intensifying race of progress  
fixes the eyes upon the causal track  
few dare now look away from; and perhaps  
a sense of evils mounting to the skies,  
a slag-heap on which utmost forgiveness slips  
backwards, has settled in the soul: it sees  
itself commercialized, and knows its blight  
is one with the decay of earthly things 1040  
too long contemned; too late, perhaps, regretted.

"And louder, in the silence of that faith,  
reverberates that voice which first intoned  
when certain tribes that had not studied long  
in civilization's school, insurged upon  
the southern fringes of the fraying empire,

their numbers mustering, pressing for more room.  
 Among them rose a man of martial spirit  
 who had hearkened when the teachers in the cities  
 spoke of One God and that God's boundless power 1050  
 and Law insuperable. He then reported  
 a vision from that God, in words that swelled  
 above the verses of the tribal poets  
 with vivid picturemaking, throbbing rhythm,  
 rhetoric mounting in the brain and pulse  
 toward ecstasy, wherein the call to prayer  
 and call to battle sounded as one blast.  
 Here was no room for spirit's opposition  
 to power and might, for spirit here with these  
 had fused. Nor was there limit set to conquest, 1060  
 one bounded promised land to have and hold,  
 but propagation by the sword prescribed  
 even to the ends of earth, and those who followed  
 the sword assured of paradise adapted  
 to the other need that follows lust of battle.  
 The strongest wishes of the violent heart  
 against which older faiths had wrestled, here  
 were in the surge of faith itself confirmed;  
 and freedom, which those older faiths had sought  
 to fortify against the attack of passion 1070  
 and circumstance, dissolved into submission  
 to the voice that from the tower beckoned, threatened,  
 incited. At its call the armies gathered  
 and marched with visionary exaltation  
 upon an empire sickened by misrule.  
 By force, and by the appeal of force, there spread  
 an empire like a magic cloak unfolding  
 out of a millet-seed, over the northern  
 shores of Africa, over Spain, resplendent  
 with spoils of wealth and learning. For a time 1080  
 that empire shone against the dark of Europe,  
 maintained by rulers generous in triumph,  
 wise to employ the wise as instruments  
 without close inquisition into thought.  
 There science and philosophy could flourish,  
 legend and art and mystic love accrue  
 upon the martial faith, enrich its fabric.  
 Yet soon that glory withered. In the north  
 resistance gathered. And within, that realm

was gripped by deepening fanaticism,  
fear of free thought, for which the praise of might 1090  
left little room. Philosophy and science  
fell silent. Schism and repression brought  
a deepening cruelty of rule and custom,  
a harsher rule of manhood over woman,  
that power recompensing every lack  
of freedom, and all poverty of spirit,  
the abuses of that power more and more  
identified with piety itself

(as has occurred in many a tradition,  
being another tendency of Time), 1100

while license given to violence and corruption  
soon crowded all renewing spirit out.

So the posterity of that great empire  
seemed capable of giving birth to only  
fresh tyrannies which presently dissolved,  
yet in defeat that faith was undefeated.

Over those weakened kingdoms swept the Tatars,  
mowers of heads, yet stayed to hear a teaching  
that liked them well enough. The West, the North,  
enabled by technology that had 1110  
but just begun consuming them, subdued  
those ignorant dynasties, those inert masses  
a century or two, yet could not win  
their loyalty away from faith that seconds  
the carnal impulse with eternal hope  
and calls all humans to identify  
with Force and its insuperable law.

“And is it not, indeed, insuperable,  
by evolution’s logic, that refutes 1120  
all reason born of foresight and of care  
for earth and for the human, in the practice?

For in the end the preachment that prevails –  
within each faith as in the trial among them –  
is not that which a syllogism proves,  
nor that which a tradition authorizes  
nor evidence of miracles, but that  
which jiggles out from the trial of replication.

A version of religion that prescribes  
incessant conquest, copious reproduction  
(the latter founded on the subjugation



of motherhood that cannot choose but bear 1130  
and bear its children to whatever fates)  
seems bound to triumph, trumping every other  
consideration, such as that the human  
image, half-hidden, is not wholly human,  
or that on finite Earth our numbers must  
reduce, by choice or not. The mystic urge  
was given us to override such reasons  
that the unreasonable might swell the more.  
Their tide now clashes with the wasteful wave  
of a technocracy that, far from serving 1140  
the needs of humankind, has rather learned  
to farm the human race in furtherance  
of its own headless schemes. Fanaticism  
and knowledge liberated from the knower  
now skirmish with each other, now shake hands,  
each one self-justified and absolute.  
It is as though the ferment of the human  
quest for transcendence and for certainty,  
that broth of insight, impulse and illusion,  
whirled in Time's centrifuge, had settled out 1150  
to these two compounds final and inert,  
though potent still to catalyze all harm.

" And what is all this but the confirmation  
of the evidence that the universe is governed  
by principles of quantity and number,  
to which whatever you perceive and feel  
may be reduced, though the reduction be  
their death, or expiration of their meaning;  
as if indeed it is not love but hate  
that drives the stars; or as if human hate 1160  
were nothing but the working in the nerves  
of an essentially mechanic All,  
and the unfortunate capacity  
for love and pain, the feeble cry for justice,  
and surely too the prudence that would save  
some food and air for future generations,  
is something Hate created in self-nurture,  
as if an accident should make its victim.  
Let Truth be what it may; what history's  
experiment bears out, is this. And knowledge 1170  
itself can only tighten up the chains

and poison Hope, that lives on ignorance.”

So speaks to me a voice that speaks to all  
now, in this time, beneath the differing hum  
of our religions and our fantasies  
of doing good, which, rooted to the ground  
by its grim fascination, take no flight:  
they know that all must walk a road that leads  
to an infinity of pain and evil,  
through darkness darkening till human mind  
calls at last to extinction, and it comes.

1180

## Chapter 8

*The need to wrestle with the self-fulfilling prophecies of determinism. Arguments for an open future. Cracks in the deterministic picture of the universe. The paradox that the deterministic world-view, as an expression of a certain tendency in human nature, appears to be an effect of what it purports to explain. Probability and indeterminism; great effects from small causes. The flaw in reductionism: the simple does not explain the complex. Goedel's theorem, arbitrariness of the laws of probability. Evidence for a self-organizing tendency, an impulse toward form and harmony in the universe; "natural selection" by itself not a sufficient explanation of life-forms. Our own pivotal position in the universe, as the life-form that can either destroy the ecosystem or become the consciousness of that system as a whole. Hypothesis of a cosmic intelligence that may yet overcome disintegrative and obscurantist tendencies.*

The first part of the task assigned at outset —  
to trace the laws that shaped the solid world  
and framed the patterns of the human mind  
such that it seems to war against all life —  
we have accomplished, and I fear too well,  
till the parameters of our disaster  
rise up before us in exorbitant lines,  
casting a shadow wherein not alone  
hope, but belief in that in us which longs  
for vision of a mended world, seems blotted. 10  
Well did an ancient prince of the handiwork  
I ply here, a belated stumbling prentice,  
spell out the warning: *Easy is descent  
to the infernal realm, the shades of death;  
but to remount that stair toward sight of sun  
and hopeful star, that is the task, the labor.*  
There's something in us draws toward the abyss  
and makes us gladly lend our voice to doom.  
How often we have seen, in our assemblies,  
how many nod acknowledgment, when one 20  
describes the steps that led to some dire strait,  
but when it comes to remedies, at once  
doubt is roused, and contention from all sides,  
till counsel of postponement is adopted  
and the evil takes its further course, unchecked  
and stronger by the faintness of all hearts.

Now we have raised an image of despair  
whose feet seem planted in the firm foundations  
of the material universe, how shall  
we conjure up a strength to match that strength, 30  
on what god call, seeing that all have failed  
and fallen back into those same foundations?  
And even supposing that we could discover  
some principle that Is, beyond the reach  
of our decay and strife: how thence derive  
axioms of thought and action that may seem  
as ineluctable of consequence  
as the great menace under which we stand,  
that all who read may see: the maze has one  
exit, and only one? For only so 40  
might a concerted and coordinated  
action begin. And even if this were done  
and the form of necessity's command  
stood clear before us: could we then desire  
to follow it? and would it be for *us*  
or for some creature which we almost were,  
too alien for our choice, and not a way  
that *we* can go?

Yet on the inner eye  
still floats a vision of the earth as whole,  
and in the mind persists a sense of being 50  
bound with that wholeness in a common fate;  
and in the inner ear reverberates,  
still, the command: *Go, speak of this as best  
you can, to who may hear*; there's still the will  
not to desist from something undertaken;  
and even Science, whose imperatives  
we've heeded to so many a purpose, here  
instructs us to begin with the assumption  
that at some point along the wall of blank  
insolubilities, a door stands open – 60  
so as not, at least, to miss it through the blindness  
of those who think there's nothing to be seen.  
Then on; no worse can come of it than is.

First with the shape of Fate we have created –  
created here, although there is no doubt  
it stalks the world – we must contend, to free  
our minds at least of its hypnotic spell.

*Let Truth be as it may*, it said, as though  
Truth made no difference to the experiment.  
Yet what we hold for truth, or hold before 70  
the truth, maybe, so as not to see it plain,  
has weight, even if it has not yet outweighed  
preponderance of mass and might and habit.  
We never were content to seek the cause  
of our own being or action in ourselves,  
but always sought it in a deeper ground,  
god, universe or universal being,  
whose face or whose ineffable retreat  
we molded from perception and desire, 80  
and from that face a force returned to us  
that molded us in turn. So now the impulse  
of mastery for ill that seems to rule us  
is not content to speak in its own name  
as impulse only, but derives a charter  
from the investigated universe,  
to which it gives a shape that blots out choice,  
makes plausible its utter dark dominion  
on earth as in those regions of the sky  
that capture light and do not let it forth.

Already we can notice that this image 90  
appears related to some tendency  
in us, to dominate and to destroy –  
is suspect, then, of being a projection  
upon a universe of which it may  
(as Kafka said) be merely a bad mood.  
Lift this projection, and we might begin  
to see beyond the narrowing confines  
this pattern draws for us, let through some ray  
from the source of human freedom, be it far  
beyond the curtain of the world's appearance 100  
or near, that point behind the inner eye  
from which our sight streams outward to the world.

We have heard, then, in the shadow of Earth's doom,  
of a creation that is no creation,  
being void of all intent or trace of Mind.  
Before all will was mass and force, the act  
of energy expanding out of nowhere,  
and then the scurrying particles, impelled

always on paths the number can describe. 110  
 From the accountable hazard of their motion  
 all that we see derives: the wheel of stars,  
 the sun, the earth and all that moves upon it.  
 The forms which we behold, the qualities  
 we apprehend, by taste and touch and sight –  
 these have no permanence, nor no foundation  
 in any thought that fashions and remembers  
 or fore-envisioning incorporeal eye,  
 but are such as persist in water rushing  
 over a rocky bed, ridge, groove and vortex  
 holding while flow and obstacle endure: 120  
 these shift away, and who will mark the place?  
 Of such is all that struggles to remain  
 itself, of such the will, of such the arrays  
 in which these entities dispose themselves  
 and interact; of such the imaginations,  
 the opinions by which they are steered, and steer  
 each other: nothing but a flimmering  
 of particles reflected on itself,  
 subject to end, as once it had begun,  
 by hazard of the whirlwind, and indeed 130  
 destined to dissolution by the law  
 which from the mouth of nothingness decrees  
 the increase of disorder over time.  
 Moreover all are bound to endless war,  
 because that which persists is that which conquers,  
 consumes, controls, outbreeds or underbids,  
 by the mere execution of instructions  
 established by coincidence of random  
 errors in copying with circumstance;  
 nor can the unchosen be revoked by choice. 140  
 As proof of which unfaith we are presented  
 with fossil, chart, and learned argument,  
 chains of equations whose invisible links  
 only the long-devoted can behold,  
 and, all too visible to all alike,  
 the products of our progress, manufactured  
 by methods we have copied from the cosmos  
 which we proceed to judge by our own makings  
 (although we say the cosmos had no maker).  
 As priest and prophet brought forth miracles 150  
 in evidence of their gods, so we accept

technology as evidence of none;  
 bomb and computer dare us contradict,  
 as thunder from the sacred mountain once.  
 And then the sheer dimensions of it all:  
 no Babylonian or Egyptian rearing  
 of towering statues could so stare us down.  
 Those eons that have dwarfed eternity,  
 those airless distances that suck out breath,  
 and, far below the surface of our sight, 160  
 withholden from our most aggrandized eye,  
 the ceaseless drama of the interaction  
 among the infinitesimally small!  
 How then believe that in this scheme of things  
 our mediocre being has importance,  
 that any eye is bent upon our doings  
 to term them good or evil, fair or foul –  
 that any Will is trained upon our struggles  
 to pull us from these straits, so much our own?  
 Then Time must take its course with us, through us, 170  
 and woe to all that grows upon its path!

Such are the arguments perdition uses  
 (we felt them stalk beside us all along,  
 and in some way, perhaps, they helped us tell  
 the tale of time); but it is very strange  
 how solidly they seem to loom before us,  
 like to a very juggernaut of proof,  
 while all the time our listening ear surprises  
 the lapses of internal contradiction,  
 assumptions whose foundations shift, and echoes 180  
 of reservation from the very minds  
 that study number, particle and star.  
 Only the argument from Force remains  
 uncountered, and may in the end refute  
 all vision by just putting out the eye;  
 but otherwise, it does not stand to reason  
 to judge the universe by our own makings  
 yet say the universe was never made;  
 to call it mindless and mechanical,  
 with form a mere by-product of the flux, 190  
 and yet regard those patterns in the flux  
 as rigid and unalterable by will,  
 even while admitting that a complex world

is unpredictable, that even one  
 minute condition altered at the start –  
 say, by the act of will of one small creature –  
 rolls down time’s slope to mighty difference.  
 Nor does it seem that time alone sufficed  
 to draw from simple plasma all the beings,  
 the forms, of which the universe is full 200  
 (especially if we say that time must tend  
 toward dissolution). For the elemental  
 does not contain the later, the composite,  
 nor all the principles of derivation,  
 but laws appear, each in its proper time,  
 with the phenomena they seem to govern,  
 as if emerging out of some dimension  
 deeper than sequence. Neither can the numbers  
 account for all, since ratiocination  
 tracked itself to Goedel’s recognition 210  
 that every realm it can stake out, within  
 what-is-the-case, by axiom and proof,  
 may somewhere lie unfortified, or harbor  
 the open treason of a contradiction  
 and never hold the whole. Beyond all claims  
 there may then dwell a Nothingness or Being  
 that’s numberless, yet emanates all that  
 which may be quantified, and number’s laws.  
 The laws of probability, to which  
 causality is now reduced: they rest 220  
 not upon logical necessity  
 but on some throw of dice where Chance is not –  
 or maybe, on the action of some Will?  
 At matter’s depth the mysteries of mind  
 reappear, like particles from the void,  
 like those twin particles that, being disjoined,  
 behave as though from knowledge of each other.  
 By strongest light of analytic mind  
 the cosmos in its next-to-naught appears  
*more a great thought*, one said, than a great machine. 230  
 Nor is the word, the currency and template  
 of human thought, mere recent accident.  
 We saw how in the earliest recognition  
 of shapes that harm or help, it was foreshadowed;  
 but here’s a stranger thing: the gene for “eye”  
 will, in a fruit-fly, form a compound eye



and in a frog, a little camera  
 like that we own. Could it then be that meaning  
 was, from the first, inwoven in life's warp?  
 Nor need the numbers make the world a matter 240  
 of quantity and sequence and no more.  
 We picked them up to keep our useful tallies  
 of earlier and later, few and many;  
 yet to our contemplation they convolve,  
 exfoliate, revealing properties  
 undreamt of by the brain that drove the hand  
 to make that row of scratches on the stone –  
 though sensed perhaps, the way utility  
 and sacredness were often intertwined  
 in our kind's first impressions of the world, 250  
 the moon's return bespeaking to our souls  
 proportions which Pythagoras and Kepler,  
 who without instruments beheld the mind,  
 divined and half-erroneously described,  
 harmonic structures in the universe  
 that speak of an implicit dream of order.  
 Nor is it true that matter in itself  
 tends toward the lifeless and the inert; instead  
 to our renewed experiment it shows  
 as it were an inherent mindfulness 260  
 watching its opportunity to fashion  
 design where randomness had been before,  
 configuring compounds beyond reckoning  
 of energy inpoured, and intimating  
 the impulse that has driven it into life  
 and life to convolutions more entwined.  
 Nor are the living things we see mere products  
 of multiplying molecules, improved  
 by being hurled senseless against each other  
 like our war-engines, while the prize is given 270  
 to fortunate confusion of the genes –  
 it is an all-too-human thought that Force  
 and Error the unmakers made the world.  
 It rather seems that Evolution takes,  
 to some extent, the creature as a whole;  
 it is a metamorphosis proceeding  
 not by the inching pace of gradual change  
 but rather marked by sudden flashings-out  
 of form, as to the artist's groping mind

a new shape in old elements appears, 280  
breaking the continuity which then  
resumes through ages where the form is constant  
in basic plan, although the outline stretch  
by breeding's chance to various distortions —  
nor are these always of a helpful kind.  
Those antlers feint or combat made to tower  
above the stag's head as a cumbrous ballast  
have made the species cuckold to one impulse,  
for that which benefits the individual  
within the species, may unfit the species, 290  
while that which overfits the single kind  
to tilt against the cycles that contain it  
can with the kind, the cycles, not endure.

Strife, then, is not sole parent of all things;  
we needs must posit, to account for Being,  
a second parent — Love, or Harmony —  
an impulse of communication, joining,  
that makes of scattered elements a whole,  
is not reducible to isolate cause  
but shimmers in the fine coordination, 300  
the indefinable accord to which  
each seeming separate element listening moves.  
We find its workings still, even where substance  
lies pinned and stripped beneath the objective eye,  
in those twin notes' united separate twitching,  
in those compounds that alter in the alembic  
not gradually but everywhere at once  
as by a signal everywhere received;  
and it is felt behind a thousand veils  
in the sphere of living creatures, where the paths 310  
of plant and animal, insect and microbe  
so densely mesh, configurate to patterns  
that speak not mere coincidence of blind  
strivings, but something like a weaving hand  
that lays these strivings on a loom and threads them  
into designs no single figure guesses.  
And yet the strivings are not blind forever.  
The play of life's improvisation opens  
a tiny field of vision and provision  
that, as the eons pass, goes on enlarging; 320  
and likewise grows the social web that links

mind to other mind in its unfolding,  
until in us is formed the mind that aims  
beyond the mark of its own sustenance  
toward comprehension of the whole, that finds  
on sound's continuum the well-tempered scale,  
those harmonies that sound beyond the bounds  
of place and time and culture, even species,  
if true the scientific tale that plants  
grow best with Mozart playing in their air, 330  
although that flute has yet to find a charm  
against the dragons raging in our blood.  
It is our lot to represent a crisis  
inherent in the nature of creation,  
where all things are dependent on the whole  
yet the whole has, as yet, no creatural voice.  
Its harmony is woven of the paths  
along which every living being must seek  
perpetuation, now in consonance  
with other beings, now at counterpoint. 340  
Each hunger has its food, each danger has  
its warning and its fear, by ancient use  
and precedent recorded in the archives  
of brain and nerve, to be retrievable  
at a familiar call. But heretofore  
the Whole was safe, by being too immense  
for creatural act to grasp at its foundations;  
it had no voice, because it needed none.  
Not that it was not felt, the way contentment  
is felt by creatures when their needs are filled 350  
for the time being, and no danger near;  
in such a space perhaps the simplest being  
opens some pore of sentience that drinks in  
presence of greater entity enduring  
beyond its brief and singular expressions,  
as at some interval of war and nurture  
perhaps there is no human who has not  
said in the inmost heart, I am but one  
among the uncounted who have kept the watch  
of humankind beneath the circling stars 360  
and will yet keep it, when my time is spent.  
It is a new thing, that one single wave  
threatens the ocean with outrageous surge,  
a peace is broken which the eons kept,

old sanctuaries of tranquillity,  
to which the humbled could repair, are now  
invaded by a fear that had kept its distance.  
But now that it is so – then if indeed  
a mindfulness inhabits these recesses,  
then surely thence must issue some commands, 370  
directions for a creature that must now  
assume the whole, become its mind and heart,  
composing life to new and higher order  
by the new means of consciousness and choice,  
or else with fatal passion rack this sphere!  
There must be in reserve some knowledge, some  
science, even, more in tune with All  
than ours, which is the prying of the creature  
raised by the exponent of our cunning  
to world-exploding power, held by us 380  
in perilous trust for all the earth has borne.

Of all the creatures that arose before us  
none intends good, yet each does little harm  
because of limitations that apply  
to the gigantic as to the minute.  
Each one pursues its momentary goal;  
none sows that it may reap; none gathers in  
more than a winter's need; none dreads its death  
nor schemes to cheat creation of its due;  
but yet the elements of such intention 390  
are present even in the simplest being  
which the need to survive and reproduce  
commits to acquisition and control,  
so that our own inordinate power seems  
the granting of a wish common to all,  
though wishes granted, as the stories tell us,  
bring unwish in their wake. So with reflection  
of primal thought in conscious creatural mind  
came also thought of death, by which the creature  
is straitened, so that through such strait it sees 400  
the generous universe that gave it birth,  
feels its own dying in the falling leaves  
and can but envy the returning spring.  
Envy and need of mastery combined  
with apprehension which, the tongue betrays,  
is but the abstraction of the monkey's grasp,

mark out the way of knowledge which we follow  
 when we define as truth such acts of matter  
 as flatter our dominion-dream, by being  
 predictable, repeatable, recurring, 410  
 producible by self-same conjuration,  
 at last mechanical. So we have set  
 the laboratory's stage for matter's trial,  
 controlling and repeating, till we build  
 from all our reproducible results  
 the image of a universe untouched  
 by the finger of imponderable and always  
 unique event, alone revivifying  
 what's bound beneath the bootheel of decay.  
 And by such knowing we have built the kingdom 420  
 of mindless things, boasting ourselves the while  
 that we have had the secret of creation.  
 It is not that we might not someday make  
 even a vehicle to capture breath.  
 It is that even then our memory,  
 although we might not heed it, would distinguish  
 between a world of born, and one of made,  
 or even between made and made, the times  
 some shadow of the grace of living things –  
 the seal of their appurtenance to something 430  
 more than the singularity of need –  
 rested upon the work of human hands:  
 on painted vase and sculptured pediment,  
 on veinèd soaring vault, on web that held  
 the dance of bird and beast as if still free,  
 on haft of tool that served some daily purpose  
 yet looked to have been carved for its own sake.  
 As now before our eyes creation darkens  
 into the look of our appliances,  
 the myriad creatures of our need and greed 440  
 that multiply through us and yet beyond us  
 in a momentum that is exponential,  
 stemming from us, and yet no longer ours,  
 and that reshapes us to its inorganic  
 demand, that simplifies desires and faces,  
 cancelling introspection, variation,  
 till life as in polluted waters takes  
 fewer and fouler forms, yet still increases,  
 each day more deathlike life and lifelike death –

doom's argument from ingenuity, 450  
to minds that shake off sleep, is self-impeached:  
if we have thrust a shuttle in the loom  
ill-fitted to the warp, this testifies  
that the equations have left something out,  
we have not grasped the secret of creation  
but let it go, grasped something else instead,  
or only part of it, in which there is  
no health, unless the other part be found.  
And last: the two abysses of the vast  
and the minute, Pascal already saw; 460  
and those today who reckon that we stand  
between the Ångstrom unit and the light-year,  
between the eon and the nanosecond,  
as median of magnitude, begin  
likewise to sense that our dimension holds  
the measure and the ratio of creation.

As thus we seek to weave the threads of meaning  
which science brings to us, the universe  
seems not "a great thought" only, but a story  
whose outline still is but a wavering shape, 470  
even as its outcome is yet unforclosed.  
An intuition of Empedocles,  
who saw before analysis had zoomed  
in to obscure the forest with the trees,  
returns to bid us once again perceive  
all things as issuing from the interaction  
of Love and Hate, one tending to disjoin,  
dissolve, scatter, the other to connect,  
compose and constitute, and both conjoined  
forever in a dance of opposites. 480  
The principle of hate, of entropy,  
of separation and antagonism,  
seems in itself incapable of form,  
indifferent and even hostile to it.  
Yet without hatred nothing could be formed  
distinct, but all re-merge into the Oneness;  
form happens through the recapture of that force  
that always is in flight from primal center,  
that breaks through every outline, every shell,  
and so compels the principle of Love 490  
to mold a further form. Each tries to use

the other for its ends: the shattering force  
 appropriates a vehicle of form,  
 the will to form is stirred by shattering  
 to every higher levels of creation,  
 and neither acts at all without the other.  
 And these be not enumerable forces  
 but metaphysical principles, that use  
 all that is calculable for their ends,  
 although the path of Hate appears the easier 500  
 to trace by methods that employ division.  
 Moreover, if our temporal patterns are  
 projected, as by some arcane decision  
 at hidden juncture beyond space and time,  
 we may read Hate as the prolonged momentum  
 of the initial thrust out from the Source,  
 Creation as that exile from the One  
 of which the masters of the Kabbala  
 dreamed on the midnight of their tribulation,  
 whereby that which was whole in light became 510  
 detached, inert, self-ignorant, and yet  
 keeps striving back through ever-higher forms –  
 more-comprehensive, -integrating forms –  
 and is cast down again, to be recast  
 until some final moment of redemption,  
 some final clarity of reintegration –  
 so we may hope. And then it may appear  
 that in our time the full destructive force  
 precipitated, took on final shape,  
 that in beholding it (although the vision 520  
 is fraught with fascination and with danger)  
 we might become aware of what we are  
 despite it, and by doing so come free.

So we begin to understand the plot  
 of the play life enacts upon Earth's stage –  
 for all we know, on many stages scattered,  
 hidden from one another behind points  
 of distant light, yet contemplated surely  
 from beyond Time by authoring Intellect  
 that framed our plight and possibility. 530  
 And shall that Intellect not finally favor  
 its semblance in the mirror of creation  
 against what seeks to darken and cast down?

## Chapter 9

*Evidence for paranormal phenomena, as intimations of an awareness not limited by the senses of the individual and a force not accounted for by the laws of physics. Laboratory parapsychology; anecdotal evidence for clairvoyance, telepathy, precognition, telekinesis. Arguments for and against immortality. The important question seen to be not so much personal immortality as the fate of the greater being to which all belong. The conclusion that spiritual forces are focused by forms. Reframing of the problem as the search for the form of thought and action that would attune us to the mind and energy of the greater being, and thus enable us to repair the world.*

So we may reason, listening to words  
that rise from reckonings we cannot fathom,  
words which to their own speakers may well seem  
like the wind-fretted foam to which the ground-swell  
breaks on the beach. Yet if such stammerings  
issue from something like a substance in  
the depths beyond the reach of either common  
knowledge or specialized investigation,  
might we not also reach that substance through  
inquiry of our own prophetic Soul? 10  
— A thing as often doubted as invoked;  
yet the soul's tenuous consistency  
insists, at times, that it is here for more  
reasons than evolution knows about.  
It feels an influx from beyond itself  
of inspiration, energy, or love;  
in pondering its pathway through the world  
it sees a pattern of events, no doubt  
projected from within itself, yet also 20  
as though arranged by larger destiny  
to speak to it, to guide it, from beyond  
the circle of its knowledge and its powers.  
In a fair trial of the global cause  
shall not such testimony be received?  
And yet again, what can such witness weigh,  
considering how self-interest inflects  
the private dream, just as the need of war  
threads propaganda into revelation,  
to justify the unjustifiable  
and furnish Doubt with righteous arguments, 30



so that the ties of all religions lie  
slackly around us, cut off by our sense  
that they have failed in the face of what we fear?

But now our vision has conducted us  
out to a land that lies forever barren  
beyond the borderline of any future  
our rational conjecture can possess,  
we must attempt to see that doubted thing,  
the soul, for what it is, and if it holds  
some final gift, reserved for this petition. 40  
A journey to the underworld of thought  
we undertake, as in that eldest myth,  
Gilgamesh for Enkidu's sake descended,  
not now for an elixir to ensphere  
a creatural life in immortality,  
but for some talisman of understanding,  
some herb of healing that would help us loose  
the hands our kind would lay upon itself  
and on the globed creation it inhabits,  
some certainty that that in us which feels 50  
it is not I or you nor he nor she  
nor mine nor yours nor his nor hers alone  
but ours and of some Will that made the world  
and dwells in it and longs for its perfection  
may count upon some strength which, called upon,  
could overturn the overtowering odds –  
that there is substance to the ancient tales  
of miracles, deliverances, which stopped  
Might's engine in its tracks, and kept alive  
the hope of good and those who held to it – 60  
May we yet speak such hope, and not be mocked  
by those who tabulate objective findings.  
So help us, nameless Power, if You are,  
and if our kind's continuance and unfolding  
into its better longings, be Your will.

Doubt of the soul: how many generations  
have walked the earth, and almost all believed  
unquestioningly in powers of the spirit  
and wedded them unthinkingly to such  
powers of arm and arms as they possessed, 70  
till among spirit's various bedlam guises

such strife awoke, that we might almost think  
 we built the structure of determinism  
 to be a sanctuary from all that.  
 Then the habit of investigation formed;  
 we laid down demonstrations, block on block,  
 by Occam's razor millimeter-trimmed,  
 and did not always ask if the reduced  
 ranks of causes really could explain  
 everything that needed explanation 80  
 and begged to be included in What-Is.  
 Therefore within the accounted world there spread  
 the blind spot of the unaccounted-for,  
 edged by a muffled sense of that which *is*  
 and yet is orphaned of our understanding  
 or carries with it, like a leper's bell,  
 some fear that makes us shun it, or at best  
 throw over it some costume old or new,  
 that, masked, we may invite it to our revels  
 and even crown it king, as if in jest. 90  
 Thus on the fringe of Reason's well-planned city  
 (just at the time when Science claimed the throne  
 on which we once had seated the Creator)  
 arose a motley tent- or trailer-camp,  
 home to visionaries, revelators,  
 theosophists and mystics and clairvoyants,  
 psychics and mediums, peddling doctrines borrowed  
 from various traditions, new-combined,  
 accompanied by purported demonstrations  
 of spirit contravening matter's sway, 100  
 transgressing bounds of time and death and distance.  
 Protest against mortality enforced  
 by scientific rigor, an insurgence  
 against the iron laws of matter's fate,  
 impelled, no doubt, these seekers, these purveyors  
 of what was sought. And those who then  
 rose to expose, debunk, refute, were doubtless  
 impelled by love of truth, or hate of falsehood—  
 but was their zeal quite uncontaminated  
 by the wish to scotch revolt, impose dominion, 110  
 which to Determinism lends its steel?  
 At last the advocates of psychic power  
 sought confirmation in experiments  
 beneath the laboratory's lamp, to pinch

the spirit in the straits of our control,  
 where answers may be counted, and the tally  
 subjected to the ordeal of statistics,  
 factoring out fortuitous conclusions.  
 They then could find that subjects of the lab  
 could sometimes read the symbol on the card 120  
 held by one whose face they could not see;  
 statistics showed the light of information  
 dawned somehow in the concentrating mind.  
 They fashioned a device that let a ball  
 roll down a chute with even chance of dropping  
 to one side or another, and again  
 some were found who by concentrating could  
 inflect its path, so that it fell to one  
 or the other side, more often than the odds,  
 mounting again toward meaning, would allow. 130  
 And more elaborate ordeals were devised,  
 as when a set of images was laid  
 before a subject who then meditated  
 upon them, one by one, while in another  
 room another subject registered  
 the meditator's thought, and copied down  
 the images, which could be recognized  
 not quite exactly, but as in a dream  
 diurnal happenings return, not so  
 that from the dream we'd know what had occurred, 140  
 but knowing what occurred we find it mirrored  
 upon the dream. So the experimenters  
 believed that they had proved that on some level  
 we know more than our senses can report;  
 we read each other's thoughts, we scan the world  
 without a signal that can be detected  
 by instrument, or blocked by insulation  
 or barred by distance; nor is our perception  
 helpless, but can handle without hands  
 what we perceive and may desire to move. 150  
 Skeptics found fault with the experiments,  
 repeated them under their own controls,  
 and failed to find what had been found at first,  
 so that Doubt's citadel remained untaken.  
 But might it be that what had deigned to show  
 under the laboratory's sterile light  
 and quickly veil again, some patch of surface,

did not like being asked one question twice,  
as Jung found when consulting the I Ching?  
Or we may guess that the first eager testers 160  
were motivated by desire to prove,  
indeed, the spirit, while the later ones  
were trammled by a need of making sure  
or a determination to disprove —  
kin to that predetermined unbelief  
which, rather than allow the world an Author,  
would drive conjecture to beyond extremes —  
and the results reflected such intent.

At last, then, the result is undetermined:  
the observer's will cannot be factored out; 170  
our wariness of the wish-fathered thought  
must choose which wish it ought most to beware of.  
Yet not unlike the uncertainties which science  
at last admits into its iron weave,  
the findings of these tests, if even *one*  
was not an artifact of fraud or fault,  
would cause the calculable world to seem  
a village pitched upon a sleeping whale.  
If, as we may infer from intimations  
of powers that show feeble in the light 180  
of the gray laboratory, in the absence  
of ancient discipline or the desire  
of those dear objects — vengeance, love, escape  
or gain — that seem most powerful to fashion  
messengers and executors unseen,  
we know more than the senses can report,  
we read each other's thoughts, we scan the world  
without a signal that can be detected  
by instrument, or blocked by insulation  
or barred by distance, nor is our perception 190  
helpless, but can handle without hands  
what we perceive and may desire to move —  
What is not possible? The traveler's yarn  
(whose truth, we guess, may correlate inversely  
with square of distance from the thing alleged)  
how shall we now discount? or how pick fault  
with the report of conjuring and cure,  
of sorceries that murder without dagger  
or fatal drop, of human bodies lifted

in air, while others passed their hands beneath— 200  
 in all of which we cannot part the strands  
 of influence on matter and on mind.  
 The sorcerer's victim knows himself bewitched,  
 and of his faith is forged the unseen blade  
 that finds his heart; a rope that many saw  
 rise like a snake into the air, appeared  
 upon a photographic plate as coiled  
 unmoving on the ground; yet no less strange  
 than its arising, seems the sight imposed 210  
 upon so many minds, of what was not—  
 as on the film behind the shuttered lens  
 thought's images were printed without light.  
 Nor do we know whether we hold these powers  
 severally, the way we call our own  
 the senses and the various powers of mind,  
 or whether they attest a single field  
 of sentient mind beneath a surface broken  
 into our selves, to and through which it shows  
 itself in its own time.

Nor is it certain 220  
 that this is ours alone in the creation.  
 The plant expanding to the gardener's love,  
 the dog that howls a distant master's death,  
 imply an obscure field of sympathy  
 not bounded by our kind. And those who saw  
 the nursing cat whose need appeared to draw  
 the else so wary mouse out of its hole,  
 the aging moose that did not stand its ground  
 but broke into a run, and the wolves took it,  
 have wondered if there is not, underneath 230  
 the chessboard where the separate creatures ply  
 their strategies, awareness that maintains  
 a balance by dispatching them at times  
 by errands counter to their paths of interest;  
 and when the dice obey the gambler's bent,  
 how do we know it is not by some thrill  
 responding from the animate depth of matter?  
 And yet this power is not everywhere  
 and equally apportioned. Of our kind  
 some individuals more than most inherit 240  
 the psychic gift, which they for singular end  
 employ; they train themselves, like the musician

or acrobat, to exercise their skill.  
 They mark the trail within them to the place  
 of second sight, and travel it at will;  
 they read the stranger's thought and find lost things  
 in crevices of the world; and among tribes  
 less apt to extend the mind in outward fashion  
 much news is borne along the inner road;  
 and it is told that powers not content  
 with cloak and dagger, overflying plane  
 and microphone and -film, now seek to use 250  
 the secret passage of the mind. But then  
 again, it seems none ever was so deep  
 in the counsels of the hidden, as to see  
 consistently, but like the bridegroom's strength  
 the gift may fail, leaving bereft the one  
 who thought to wield it as we wield the things  
 we make to do our bidding. Hence the eternal  
 cheating to eke out omniscience  
 and keep the seeming when the being's flown  
 (which gives such seeming-solid grounds for doubt). 260  
 It lifts the sorcerer up and lets him fall;  
 and we who greet the power when it comes  
 as if in answer to our call, forget  
 to reckon how it moves us unawares.  
 We guess that much that passes for prediction  
 is only second sight, and the extension  
 of straight lines to the point where they must meet,  
 as when the letter in the postman's pack  
 sponsors a dream of news due to arrive.  
 The present (says one adept) is a crossing 270  
 of roads, each leading through a different landscape,  
 a friendly village here, an ambush there,  
 as we with second sight perceive, and choose;  
 but this holds only till what comes to meet us  
 comes by the choice of others, who themselves  
 at their own crossroads hesitate, and move  
 themselves through many junctions of their choice  
 with choices of still others, and so on  
 without end, in the indefinite, unless  
 all choice is somewhere known (that is to say, 280  
 determinate) and time is an illusion,  
 or unless the unconscious mind can plot  
 the aggregate result of all the choices

which, like the atoms that compose an object,  
flock to *Gestalt*, although the flight of each  
be unpredictable.

Or unless the mind  
that incubates prediction is itself  
a force that acts unknown on distant wills  
and masses, moves them to some end conceived  
in the dark lap of unavowed desire 290  
seeded, for all we know, from elsewhere yet—  
for if there is hypnosis at a distance,  
who'll point to where it starts, or say which lives  
were not the acting of an alien dream?  
Small wonder if we fled to an inert  
causality, out of that jungle welter  
of wish and counter-wish, grasping the fact  
of earth and all the iron hid within it,  
ready to weapons more maleficent 300  
than any sorcerer's curse, but known, but seen—  
or seeming to be seen; the use of all  
that rationality hatches out is brooded  
within the darkness of the human heart.  
In iron structures of reality  
precipitated out, in space and time,  
our own will to constriction now confronts us,  
till we forget it was our own, or even  
ascribe ourselves to its causality.

All we have seen till now, however strange 310  
to our self-limiting sense, is yet bound up  
with the creation as the senses know it;  
although the action of an unknown force,  
the presence of a dark field of attraction,  
is apprehended, yet it operates  
among material entities, that have  
weight and motion in the visible world.  
And therefore some have thought the force itself  
may be material; have interposed  
between the subjects of experiment  
long distances and cages of dense wire—  
but it is not a wave that these can block 320.  
Perhaps, then, some imaginary flicker  
that might have mathematical existence  
without a mass, like the surmised neutrino?

But when the experimenters rearranged  
the unseen random processes whereby  
a concentrating subject summoned up  
this or that figure on a screen, no change  
was registered in manifest result:  
the form intended brought itself about  
without regard for the statistic means. 330

Still there are those who strive to integrate  
the psychic force to the physical domain,  
as if it were a property of matter  
like gravity (mysterious, itself),  
or as if the cosmos were a hologram  
wherein each mote and instant holds the all  
of where and when; save that in such inclusion  
we cannot find the forms of thought and feeling  
as which we know ourselves, as which we act  
upon each other and the world by known 340  
and unknown means, encountering each other  
through the material world, but not quite in it.  
If once the psychic element's admitted,  
not only is priority of thought  
suggested, but priority of form,  
of quality, identity, name, even;  
for not on atoms or on volumes does  
the power of mind take hold, but upon *things*;  
and surely not as particles but as  
entities we inflect each other's paths, 350  
irreducible in principle  
although we be destructible in fact.

But now we cannot but perceive to what  
threshold of belief our argument  
has drawn us, drawn perhaps from the beginning  
by you, O sirens of eternity,  
friends whose fate, already half our own,  
tempted our mind beyond the earthly limit  
out to the empty spacelessness of death!  
Have we not in that wasteland gathered tokens, 360  
coincidences chiming with our thoughts  
of you, addressed by us to us from you,  
to prove you whisper: if without the mount  
of sense our thought can travel, why then should  
thought fail us when our senses fail? Think rather



form and capacity of thought remain  
 in the invisible, whether to dwell  
 as thought within the Mind that sent them forth  
 or else, re clothed, return. If mind is first  
 and builds itself of matter in the world, 370  
 shall the conception not survive the draft?  
 – Yet we have seen how before death can die  
 the thought of all the child looked forward to,  
 the man or woman strove for, gained, endured;  
 how accidents to tissues of the brain  
 can snatch the very soul away, and plant  
 a changeling in its place; how by excising  
 from the brain's underside a little bulb  
 the longing for immortal love is slain.  
 How much is in us that we cannot trace 380  
 to the configuration of the genes  
 so deeply intricate that the child repeats  
 the gesture of a parent never seen?  
 Add to this the overlay of nurture,  
 then take both away, and what remains?  
 – We may reply to this from a surmise  
 fed by those junctures when we seemed to catch  
 the uncanny orchestration of events  
 called synchronicity, where lines of cause  
 from separate origins were brought together 390  
 and suddenly resolved into a chord  
 that cancelled the priority of time.  
 True, it is to our minds that the conjoining  
 signs were signs, and joined; yet deeply by these tokens  
 we knew the universe was meant to mean,  
 our minds contained the thought that what occurs  
 is not descended solely from the past  
 but is, as Freud might say, "overdetermined"  
 by the influence of that which yet must be,  
 the attraction of a pattern yet unguessed, 400  
 projected from some immaterial Mind,  
 timeless. And if that Mind's informing thought  
 is that which made us live, shall we not have  
 life in its memory?

But from such hope  
 it does not follow that the soul continues  
 in time, that from vicissitudes of flesh  
 it wakes, as we awake on mortal mornings

and are the same, or more or less the same,  
after an interval in which our thought  
through the nocturnal culvert flowed obscure. 410  
Still there is that in us which stubbornly  
would have it so, or else cannot conceive  
continuance of being without time  
(the words that try to say it mock themselves).  
Yield to it, and soon you will unlock  
the medium's trunk: the skimble-skamble stuff  
billows forth, ectoplasmic, to engulf  
your critic sense.

Yet equally appears  
the spirit of resistance to belief,  
defender of the modern faith of doubt, 420  
to view the spectacle with mocking eye  
and wrestle with the phantoms as they rise.  
To the tranced call of one that has a spirit  
come voices claiming to be of the dead,  
remembering, imposing their commissions  
(a small debt left unpaid, a wish not followed  
by the relict), providing as it were  
tokens of recognition, information  
known only to the dead, and to one living,  
or even to no one present, verified 430  
in archives or from inquiry of strangers,  
as if those in another world were trying  
to prove their own continuance – in vain.  
For even those who credit us with seeing  
and moving beyond range of eye and hand  
note that there's nothing known, or capable  
of being known, by which a spirit might  
attest itself, that could not just as well  
be learned by stealth of the unconscious mind  
upon whose midnight, as it seems, the whole 440  
world opens like a book to any page  
which in its blind assurance it may choose;  
there is no uproar of a Poltergeist  
that could more plausibly be laid to spirits  
than to some unseen motor of the living  
translating thought to motion unawares  
so as to grant its own wish to believe.  
Even those phantoms of our parting friends  
who come before us at the fatal hour

or, unseen, cause the clock to stop, the picture 450  
 to slip its hook upon the solid wall,  
 may be the language of our unknown knowledge  
 that, as in dream, invents image and action  
 to tell us what we cannot know we know,  
 and no more evidence of their last will  
 to speak with us, than next day's telegram.  
 Here truth and trickery and self-deceit  
 appear as if in twilight, indistinct,  
 so that perhaps sometimes the extended fraud  
 of string-rigged table and stuffed spirit-hand 460  
 grades into those strange sleights of mind and will  
 which make us both the magician on the stage  
 and the gulled audience. We hear report  
 from those who tricked the callers of the spirits  
 with false names, and behold, the spirits came  
 to answer them, and were as they were called –  
 and once a group of frivolous testers sat  
 around a table and cooked up a spirit,  
 voting upon his name and essence till  
 he indeed came to manifest himself 470  
 with just such pranks and rappings as one might  
 expect of him. And many a shade that sprang  
 to life in dim rooms, may have been a person  
 in the internal drama of the sitters,  
 creation of the unconscious self (or selves,  
 in some collusion, unison or union  
 beneath the surface of all conversation),  
 no more nor less real than the apparitions  
 Will Shakespeare's wand summoned to walk the Globe  
 out of the mazes of his magic mind. 480

And so it is with all soul's confirmations.  
 Adduce your memories of out-of body  
 and near-death journeys, observations made  
 from the vantage-point of air above the seeming-  
 lifeless body, then corroborated  
 by nurse or doctor to the last detail;  
 sort through the lore of those who could remember  
 a commonwealth beyond our final bourne,  
 all that topography of spirit-regions  
 where soul may wear a semblance of the body 490  
 it wore in life, and live among the imagined

props and stage-sets of its former play,  
 acting its ancient wishes, till at last  
 it tire of them and seek a higher sphere  
 or else, possessed by earthly longing, fall  
 into the funneling maelstrom of rebirth;  
 track down the stories of reincarnation,  
 question those children waking with strange talk  
 of persons, places none around them knew  
 till chance or search revealed their former kin; 500  
 ask: If on some deep level we know all,  
 why for *one* self should the veil be drawn aside  
 just on the drama of one other self,  
 why should it know so much of this and that  
 which would lie scattered and of no import  
 save that it centers in that other self  
 and, magnetized, becomes a patterned life?  
 Our skeptic daimon laughs: "Not too far-fetched  
 is anything for mortal will to live."  
 – Are we then mortal, daimon, and so mighty? 510

While thus the dubious battle sways from side  
 to side upon the field Belief-and-Doubt,  
 that thought which is the delegate of Earth  
 to our mind's parliament looks on, awaiting  
 an outcome Delphic in its either fall.  
 For if the last word is Mortality,  
 shall not all humans be subdued forever  
 beneath the fear of Might, and thereby doomed  
 to waste the earth in battle and decay?  
 And if the soul should crown itself immortal, 520  
 why should it labor for dissolving Earth,  
 why grieve for its corruption, though thereby  
 the souls of all its children be corrupted,  
 enslaved, degraded, trodden into filth—  
 it is but for a time. Let vision seek  
 a higher plane, or else another planet,  
 and tend hope's garden there.

Such comfort has  
 (to soul yet mindful of the soil that fostered  
 our flowers of song, the rock that was foundation  
 for all our towers of thought) a carrion flavor, 530  
 as do the words of many a ghost that speaks  
 through passive human mouth of higher worlds,

yet the words give not that abundant life  
 we had from earthbound spirits in the enamored  
 strife with matter to which they gave form  
 while taking law. To them indeed the dead  
 spoke sensibly – in every whispering thought  
 that came (the living knew) not from today  
 alone, but from the abyss of generations.

In every object that the living saw 540  
 and touched, they felt where vanished eyes and hands  
 had rested, and how every word had lain  
 on lips that move no longer. And who'll venture  
 to say that our awareness of the dead  
 in this way is not also theirs of us  
 and of the task to which they still are joined?  
 It is the thought of soul's continuation  
 dissevered from the consequence of what  
 on earth it marred or mended, from the yoked  
 straining of souls in bodies, that appears 550  
 inane, a shirking of the spirit's task.

If spiritual authority forbade  
 traffic with ghosts, perhaps it was instructed  
 by the same sense that poses to us now  
 in the construction of this hour's plight  
 our human destiny as aggregate,  
 bound to the rock whereon our tent is pitched.  
 Before the human soul the fate of Earth  
 is set, a riddle and a complex problem  
 which it must solve to demonstrate itself 560  
 and its high patent of nobility  
 deriving from the Mind that is not matter,  
 source of all freedom. And although the answer  
 must form in isolate mind, and be transmitted  
 from isolate mind to mind, it must aspire  
 to a circumference enclosing Earth,  
 or else compound at outset with despair.

– Still argues the ambiguous Comforter:  
 "If mind that holds itself responsible  
 for life, and a material arrangement 570  
 in which the cosmos finds its culmination  
 and so rejoins the immaterial freedom,  
 should lose its grip here, leave of all its works  
 only dead traces for the stars to read,  
 even so the universe might somehow learn

from our experience, felt by secret channel  
upon some other dust-mote in the All,  
the black hole of our misery and confusion  
flare out, a quasar, at the event-horizon  
of alien minds made wise by our disaster..." 580

– This saves the scheme of things, even the Creator  
and our immortal souls, which may then find  
a world on which to live down their disgrace,  
and yet comes to the same. For if we learn  
something from failure, it is that the attempt  
was serious, the lost was worth the saving.  
It is not heaven alone that judges earth:  
earth judges all the heavens, and its surface  
is like a dial on which soul's truth is shown.

From wild conjecture as from questioned fact 590  
we are brought back again to our sole self,  
which, pondering its pathway through the world,  
perceives a pattern of events, no doubt  
projected from within itself, yet also  
as though arranged by larger destiny  
to speak to it, to guide it, from beyond  
the circle of its knowledge and its powers.

Not subject to controlled experiment  
this sense, by definition anecdotal,  
and to this, too, the quantitative mind 600  
objects that among many many many  
events that in each day and moment happen  
some will inevitably be bound to chime;  
and nothing answers this except the sense  
of story that we have in our own lives,  
to which coincidence appears a sign  
and symbol of some destiny arranged  
as if an Author dropped an obvious hint.

All seems, then, matter of interpretation,  
which has no power to impose itself, 610  
unlike the ineluctable equation.

The Undeterminate – that More, which through  
the cracks in the reductive universe  
we glimpse with straining eyes – will not compel us,  
has no compelling shape, or bids us know  
that any shape we see is of our making.

Yet this much we have gathered on our tour  
of the unacknowledged, and can hold with something  
like certainty: the power of the form,  
the symbol, to align within their field 620  
the matter we call things, the thing called matter.  
In some like manner as the eye's idea,  
the entelechy of the kind, attracts  
and choreographs atoms and organelles,  
so the occulted family romance  
provides an axis for coincidences,  
the shapes of our first love and fear becoming  
parental presence quickening the world.  
And since we children drew connecting lines  
between the dots of stars, and mapped the wheel 630  
we call the Zodiac, we can surprise  
our skeptic selves with correspondences  
of charted sky and character inflected  
not by the mass of stars and constellations  
but by their deep reflection in the pool  
of our continuous mind. Let the beginning  
and end of all be formless: in the world  
It works through form, whether that form be statue  
or law that draws a pattern of behavior.  
And if we are admitted to Its counsels 640  
and hold in fee some measure of Its freedom,  
then this can only be a liberty  
to choose, or modify at least, the form  
that channels our intention.

So the riddle,  
the task, comes clear: we are advised to seek  
the Form that's true to Earth's predicament,  
that may so focus power of mind on matter,  
even on the arcane codes of our compulsion,  
as to impel and help us to restore,  
preserve, enhance, the fabric of creation, 650  
not render down to ugliness and death  
the labor of the eons. In the finding  
of such a form, and its communication  
from mind to mind, we will yet hope, and pray,  
for help beyond the realm of calculation.

## Chapter 10

*The search for the effective form begins with the “globe” of the individual mind, as the “model” for the consciousness of earth. The phenomenon of “groupthink”: religious and political movements tend to be less conscious than their individual adherents. The problem: to find a form for concerted action that would not sacrifice individual consciousness. The search for the juncture at which the choice between conscious community and collective groupthink is made. Individual mind; tension between autonomous selfhood and outside influence. The hope of reconciling this tension through integration of outside knowledge – including knowledge of others – into the self, and through the consent of the several selves to be integrated into a common design. The perennial frustration of this hope linked to the dissolution at adolescence of the mother-bond, which interrupts the development of individuality and subordinates the individual to a collectivity geared toward conflict. The mother-image as archetype of wisdom and community, and the key to a resumption of integrative development.*

What we have traced among the points where spirit  
crops out upon the surface of the world  
spells hope for the revival of hopes quenched  
by failure of revolt, reform, where form  
was absent. If there's power in reserve  
which to be made effective must be focused  
in form of image, word and hallowed act  
from whence meridians of mental force  
emanate, and whereinto they bend,  
so that along these lines all the decisions 10  
of conscious thought, the stirrings of emotion,  
configurate till they increase attraction  
down to the depth where even matter's moved, –  
then all depends on finding of the form.  
For orphaned of some overarching matrix  
in which they might embed themselves, our acts  
and thoughts lack continuity, a gust  
of force can scatter them without a trace,  
or undetected suasion can deflect  
their drift, till the result belie the intent, 20  
or else the massive quantity of all  
that's yet unchanged, must swallow newness down:  
such cannot generate the radiant message



that swallows entropy and reassembles  
diffusion, to infuse it with new life.  
Where then, in what mirror of contemplation  
shall we behold the form that truly answers  
in multifarious exactitude,  
without which answer would be none, our need?

Are we not led around to that beginning 30  
in which, as mind in solitude, we sat  
before the image of the planet Earth  
whose mute word we attempted to decipher?  
We knew and know: that near and distant globe  
can only speak to those two hemispheres  
one skull encloses, in a unity  
of self that may be questioned, yet the vision  
of unity of self, at least, persists  
and gives a shape to thought. Always this one  
self looks out and in upon this world 40  
and fears for it, and pleads on its behalf.  
To speak is to be mindful of the self,  
to weigh words is to weigh them for one self,  
not on behalf of some blind aggregate  
which, driven by the logic of bare numbers,  
hopeless of careful thought, plunges along.  
Now we must think for the sake of thought itself,  
which in each subject holds a world entire,  
though in the pincers of mortality,  
and by the very power of reflection 50  
that constitutes its being, must desire  
not only to survive, but to preserve.  
The Individual Mind; it sees, it grasps,  
today, the image of a common task  
(though as yet unresolved to such detail  
that would show every I its own assignment);  
but it is all our sorrow since we woke  
into awareness under Time's command  
that Premonition, which can speak so clearly  
within the chambers of the isolate heart, 60  
seems for the most part powerless to convoke  
those isolate who hear it; they instead  
run out to where the thoughtless bugle sounds,  
or haggle with each other for what all  
have lost before the bargaining began.

Just at the point where urgency compels  
our thought to leave its ivory cell in search  
of kindred thought and covenant and deeds  
devised to common end, it seems to yield,  
go blind, and take an unenvisioned way, 70  
swept onward by the logic of division,  
now senselessly contending in a tongue  
no other understands, now joined with others  
in hasty compacts that preclude true thought,  
till all at last in unison declare  
there is no common truth.

The elephant  
which seven blind men quarreled to define  
might have been known among them, had they only  
patience to patch their varying report  
into a map of it; but they fell out 80  
because contention seems imperative  
to separate being, each striving to annul  
the other's thought, and prove itself supreme,  
even inventing difference where none  
exists, to prove itself original,  
fencing perception to a property  
against the angle of my neighbor's vision,  
dragging each one a stone from the foundation  
that might have borne an architrave of peace.  
Nor seems it better when some general frame 90  
of mind is clapped over some group or other,  
subsuming individual thought, imposing  
identical opinion: then indeed  
tongues clack in unison, hands work in rhythm,  
but now the fear is greater than before.  
We dream the aggregate mind might be a vessel  
into which knowledge and perception flow  
from several eye and brain, to be shared forth  
among the knowers pledged to see as one;  
but ever again it shows itself as Moloch 100  
demanding sacrifice, even of perception,  
in the name of a common mind that is  
not common and not mind. It is what no one  
wholly believes, yet everyone subscribes to  
for the sake of contention with some They  
which every We is contoured to exclude.  
To this the great religions of the world

bear witness: though in each we may discover  
truths which the universal spirit breathes,  
yet it is not the truths that hold the faithful 110  
within the paddock, but the *quia absurdums*  
that keep the alien distant, and provide  
the fiber of the stoutest ties that bind.

These are the talismans of our belonging,  
the brands by which the shepherd knows his sheep  
among the neighbor-goats, the syllables  
laid for stumbling-blocks before the tongues  
of strangers. Would that it were more than half  
true, that all our faiths are paths converging 120  
through the world's forest on a single Source,  
instead of paths diverging from the Source  
which all alike have fled, seeking division!

This is what gives Transcendence a bad name  
and shames the soul amid the assembled proofs  
of its material compulsion. Yet  
the same phenomenon may be observed  
in secular aggregations, that invoke  
no god, but human good: in every party,  
wherever humans rally to a cause, 130  
one part of truth is sent to Azazel  
to reappear as the adversary's mask,  
the other part is tricked out for a totem  
of wholeness (which was banished with the half);  
and those who thought that, casting out all spirit,  
they cast out lies, erred no less than the first  
pagans that raised for deity a stone.

Great Wisdom of the universe! is there,  
then, no image of the mind as whole,  
true to the inner truth of every one  
and to the outer need that presses in 140  
upon us all? is there some precedent,  
some plan, some alternate system in our nerves  
that we might yet connect and make to work,  
or are we sentenced till the end of earth  
to Kafkaesque reduplicating madness  
of consciousness that cannot act itself?

—How should we seek an answer, save by looking  
more closely at the individual mind,  
searching its workings for the hidden switch

that must be thrown, if we are to get off 150  
this wrong track onto which we have been shunted  
so that we do not reach the destination,  
the junction of true minds. If we could learn  
the signals that might warn us at the forking  
and notice where the better track continues –  
though overgrown with weeds of long disuse  
or only plotted over rough terrain –  
we might begin to move toward acted wisdom.

When the mind's eye turns inward from the globe  
that bears it, and the universe which calved 160  
that globe, to see itself by the reflected  
light of Earth's danger that has made her oneness  
visible, – it sees within itself

two minds, that in it live at variance  
or often as though only half aware  
each of the other, like two residents  
of the same house, one sleeping in at night,  
one working nights and coming in at dawn.  
One mind of us is centered in itself;  
the "I" burns at the zenith of its heaven 170  
shedding all light and casting every shadow,  
its tiny point of consciousness the hub  
on which the earth, the universe revolve.

This is the mind that meditates a life  
as if it were a novel of which I  
am always the protagonist: it feels  
time as a thread of narrative that runs  
through the moment's eye, and one day will run out,  
and in that knowledge of the tale and of  
its end, it knows the earth as finitude. 180

Yet out of very self-concern it seeks  
a point of origin beyond the world  
in an authorial Mind, that thought it up  
and keeps the memory of all that's made,  
and so it rises to identify  
with that great Mind, to contemplate the world  
from the vantage of a luminary eye  
unquenched in my small death. Almost, at times,  
it sees from this great eye the world entire  
and dedicates for moments to that whole 190  
its love of self and fear for self, becoming

the faithful microcosm and the pupil  
of the creative Intellect, unclosing  
upon the dark primordial unawareness.  
True, creatural conditions do not cease  
to bind this consciousness, which is constrained,  
distorted, by each pressure from without;  
material circumstance and human force  
endanger and indenture it, as all  
it has, the very words with which it names 200  
its little world, come from the human Other,  
without whom I were windowless and dark,  
a feral child in the forest of the world;  
but something in my deepest self refuses  
to know this, out of creatural compulsion  
which in self-seeking founds each separate being,  
the small I-Am imperious as the Great,  
as surface tension rounds the drop of dew  
so that it can ensphere the distant sun;  
as the sun finds itself upon the surface 210  
of water in a cup easily shattered,  
or in a pond how light a breeze disturbs.

From these disturbances the second of  
the two minds that inhabit us is fashioned,  
at variance with I-Am and in itself  
divided, wrought by various impingements  
of alien will on my expanding sphere —  
by contact with the purposes of others  
who first pursue their own good, and if mine,  
then secondarily or by happenstance. 220

We do not see these purposes, but feel  
where we collide against them, and through pain  
we learn on the next voyage to steer clear.  
We learn what we must not do, and must do,  
what must be left unsaid, what must be said,  
what the face must not show, must try to show,  
and last we learn to intercept our thoughts,  
which at the windows of the eyes might hoist  
forbidden signals, trip the tongue to speak  
words better left unuttered, or resolve 230  
themselves and us to consequence and act  
the flesh might rue. For these we substitute  
received idea, company policy,

cliché, flat levity, conventional phrase,  
premise hallowed by sect or school of thought,  
dismissing, without seeming to examine,  
perceptions which may not be entertained,  
alert, before awareness, to the changes  
in other's face and voice and pose, the signals  
of what we have to fear, what we may dare, 240  
in a fast game that grudges time for dreaming.  
These lessons come to us; we learn them all,  
regardless of their source. The guardian slap  
on infant hand that reaches for the fire,  
the jeer of playmate at a show of weakness,  
the laws enforced by school and church and state  
for the common peace, or profit of the few,  
all the decrees of fashion in its reign  
from height of heel to theory praised or scorned —  
the mind that lives in me, yet is not mine, 250  
accepts them all, and for a single reason,  
the way a pigeon learns to peck the lever  
that brings it food or pleasure, and not pain.  
Beyond freedom and dignity, indeed,  
this mind of fear can darken origin  
until, without a hope of taking thought,  
bereft of compass, blindfold, we are herded  
toward ends we can no longer contemplate,  
but welcome the extinction of our thought  
as anodyne to its own consequence. 260  
And if I-Am, held hostage in the midst  
of this confusion, chafes against its fetters,  
then often by denying altogether  
its longing to be guided, to be taught,  
to think as others, and be one of them:  
lending its ear to the divisive counsel  
of the "anxiety of influence,"  
it fortifies a solitude with deafness  
against the voices of affinity,  
but does not thereby win its freedom back. 270

Yet somewhere in us, to the last, persists  
the hope of peace, of reconciliation  
among our warring elements, whereby  
the solar flower of consciousness might grow  
straight toward the sun again, though knowing well

it builds itself from elements derived  
 out of the alien ground – accepting this  
 as the condition of our knowledge here.  
 From our seared flesh we learn the name of fire,  
 from our stubbed toe the stubbornness of stone, 280  
 from tearing loss the needfulness of love,  
 pain being but the extreme verge of sense  
 that is the very fabric of our knowledge.  
 Yet from the Origin a confidence  
 inflows, inspiring us to use our portioned  
 bits as brick and mortar of the world  
 mind builds beneath the eye of higher Mind.  
 The mortal eye, to hold the world entire  
 and be the model of its origin,  
 strives to absorb its earthly fundament, 290  
 to understand all forces that impel it  
 this way or that. It knows that to attain  
 some shadow of the freedom of the will  
 that willed it, it must ponder every pain  
 and every pleasure, trace each to the source,  
 the grounds of their infliction or bestowal,  
 and thence decide whether to seek or shun,  
 brave or avoid, that pleasure or that pain,  
 where choice is possible: must integrate  
 all alienness into its own design, 300  
 believing this design will be, at last,  
 the pattern of a universe that serves  
 to foster mind's unfolding. Toward this end  
 the laws of matter, then the social bonds  
 that shelter, nourish, educate, maintain  
 the individual in understanding  
 have worked since earth, since time and space began.  
 And every understanding must imply  
 an intuition of the other self,  
 the other selves. And from that intuition 310  
 there grows the wish to see by remote vision  
 that which is hidden from myself alone,  
 even to link (the dream occurred, recurs)  
 the eyes of all in one composite vision  
 that would assign to every glimpse a place  
 within the sole intersubjective image  
 of our condition. Then each one would be  
 stationed on the periphery of sight

while at the same time dwelling at the center,  
containing all circumference, of Consent, 320  
that heart where every living soul would have  
both life and death, be whole and yet a part.

No less a being, now, is the earth's need,  
and if we have caught the intent of evolution,  
is it not this? As once the isolate cells  
combined, conglomerated and assigned  
each to itself a function in the whole  
at the behest of higher entelechy  
that on a sudden came to birth among them,  
so all our faculties await the hour 330  
when the orienting impulse shall go forth  
and build them to the mind of myriad sense  
equal to all the exigencies of Earth.  
Such is the urging of the cosmic time  
that's friend, not foe, to Mind; such was the vision  
of many a mystic whom our future Being  
apprised of unity – vision that now  
commands the friends of Earth to wake and speak  
till sphere of common mind englobe the sphere  
of matter.

Yet Teilhard, as others, knew: 340  
whenever we seek to climb toward the fulfillment  
of this innate vision, our ladders strike  
against some blind ceiling, a barrier  
within transparency. I-Am believes  
itself a microcosm of the All-One  
and yet is sundered far from its own semblance.  
No doubt such disappointment is built in  
to all configurations. By the same  
inherent tension of consistency  
that gave it shape, each thing, once made, resists 350  
absorption into even greater order.  
Still within each of us the primitive  
cell of the self defends its borderline,  
yields, not without resistance, to the urging  
that binds it into the structure of the tribe,  
rounding the cup from which the nation drinks  
its life, by closure against other nations.  
From this proceed much strife and dissolution  
that menace now the wholeness of the earth



and make such wholeness felt through general danger. 360

But there is above all one tie of self  
to Other and to Earth, in which the strands  
of our predicament have always been  
most curiously and intricately knotted.  
Our bodies hold the memory of a time  
when, sheltered and confined, we fed upon  
the substance of another; and somewhere  
beneath the surface of our minds, we hold  
the memory of – at worst, the disappointed  
longing for – a face that shone above us  
with joy in our existence and complete  
solicitude for all we might require.

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Where else but in that memory do mystic  
vision and Utopian hope strike root?  
And rightly so; for with the institution  
of motherhood, of parenthood, life mounted  
one rung above the chaos of contention.  
Life now was bent above another life,  
and all reflection founded on the locked  
gaze of the child and of the loving Other,

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all faith in language, on the early words  
that named and by her goodwill brought the objects,  
all hope of social progress in that first  
taste of benevolence. As with the brain  
and skull the time of sheltered infancy  
expanded, heralding our kind's preeminence,  
making the space where intellect, unbound  
from narrowing yoke of need and fear, enjoyed  
the play of contemplation and creation,  
solicitude was correspondingly  
deepened in adult man, parent and partner  
with woman drawn into that careful circle,  
providing and ordaining to preserve it.

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Let it be true that in the mother, in  
the father, wishes centered on themselves  
persist, resist the empire of the child;  
that there's no god more jealous than the child  
when brother, sister, with a rival eye  
reflect the orb of the one solicitude;  
that the child is not gentle to the need  
of parent, when in weariness it rises

400

against the offspring's unrelenting claim —  
then the earth shakes on which the little hut  
had stood so firm, the lantern of the mind  
sways, flickers wildly, casting on the walls  
shadows of demons that will haunt the world —  
Still this relation is the primal germ  
of order, higher than the mindless jostle  
of monads could construct; though only now  
and then, perhaps, the child awakes from out 410  
its own desires, the back-and-forth of Yes  
and No, presence and absence, to perceive  
a Mind that orders things for good around it,  
unconscious basis of its future faith  
(as well as love of beauty, of the earth) —  
which then, increasingly, the imperatives  
of conflict set about to undermine.

When the sharp foretaste of a man's desire  
(itself, perhaps, a shadow of the ancient  
closure of the simian adolescence, 420  
time's fontanelle, reopened that the human  
mind might further build its skyward course)  
enters the clinging of the child to mother,  
then he begins to understand and covet  
the father's place, but even in desire  
knows the wrath of the stronger as unmanning  
fear for the precious scepter and twin orb  
or for the eyes that dare to see and know  
more than the stronger gives permission for.  
And strangely intertwined in that desire 430  
are the determination to possess  
the mother as a battle-prize, already,  
and retrospective longing to return  
to the enclosure of a love that knew  
no severance, no rivalry, no warfare,  
but just the mirroring of self in self,  
requital of the gardener by the growing.  
Upon that distant idyll there intruded,  
as herald of a harder world, the father,  
feared, and yet welcomed by the blood that leapt 440  
toward future deeds, the mind toward new instructions:  
the father beckons, and the child resigns  
relation for the promise of possession,

all in him moving toward the appointed hour  
 of his ascension to the throne that stands  
 uneasy now upon the shaken earth.  
 And then that other scene: Initiation.  
 We see the manchild, body freshly scarred  
 with ordeals that detached his senses from  
 the memory of soft solicitude 450  
 and wed them to a willingness to bear pain  
 and give it: he is led forth from the circle  
 of childhood's care into the wider circle  
 of the adult group, welcomed with loud song  
 and beat of the intoxicating drum,  
 weapons are held ready for him to grasp  
 in token of his membership, his being  
 one of a many that are one against  
 the world. He dons the alienating mask  
 of totem, or the uniform, that makes him 460  
 a stranger to his own mind and perception,  
 that stamps him with the orders of the clan,  
 binds him to the collective mental structure  
 anchored in the image of the Leader  
 who teaches hands and mind to hunt and war.  
 The mother's image, which betokened care  
 for the self as an end unto itself,  
 for soul that has a name and the clear gaze  
 of childhood freedom in a world unclenched,  
 how briefly, from necessity's distorting 470  
 grip that makes us see the emperor's clothes –  
 he now must trample. If he should refuse,  
 the weapons held for him will be snatched back,  
 and tribeless, weaponless, he'll face the world  
 that wears no more the look of love, but rather  
 the mask of that most terrifying monster  
 Extinction: traceless, nameless, swallowed up  
 as something never born. So it is done.  
 Henceforth the guardians of childhood are  
 the wards of manhood, and the word that pleads 480  
 for life is barred from council. In the shadow  
 of the Unthinkable are swept together  
 indulgence for the child's tyrannic selfhood,  
 some vision of the individual spirit  
 flowering unlopped by adult strife,  
 and all the truths the tribal spell must banish

to charter combat, all complexities  
which the schematic ensign has to streamline  
into cliché to make its martial thrust,  
all those perceptions that could not be beaten 490  
into sharp swords, but rather might have been  
laid on some vast intricate loom of mind  
that shatters with the first thrust of a spear.

Thus it has been with all the sons of men  
and all their daughters too, who lead their lives  
within reflections of this act, and learn  
to set its ordeal as their price of love,  
and ever more so, as the stress of war  
grows heavier upon each generation;  
this is our kind's true primal scene and drama, 500  
to which the Oedipal passion-play, enacted  
in the first light of speech, is but a prologue.  
And when the youth, his thoughts now turned to courtship,  
calls to the future mother in the maid,  
then the riches of the individual mind  
and special self, the mother's gifts and spoils,  
are fluttered as a favor in the contest  
for female favor: they become the stuff  
of rivalry, rather than combination.

This history of self and group that shows 510  
as archetypal template through so many  
pageants of sect and school and institution  
appears to solve the riddle that confronts,  
in infinite variety of disguise,  
the mind upon the road to polity;  
here we've identified what casts the shadow  
that falls between conception and creation  
of a sustaining and harmonious order.  
And with this understanding, a direction  
of remedy is likewise indicated, 520  
as from the first, indeed, it had been sensed:  
to speak of "Gaia" and "Earth Household" – was  
it not to guess that in maternal form  
the rede to rescue Earth would have to come?  
Strange sleight of time, that brings our ancient thought  
back from the precincts of forgotten myth  
laden with meanings of most recent hour:

it was, then, for more reasons than they knew  
(or than we knew in the ages of our pride)  
that those who were before us called the Earth 530  
our mother. Not alone the bringing-forth  
from darkness of the soil to light and day,  
nor flow of nourishment to root and mouth,  
but this: that in the image of the mother,  
feared more than danger, trodden underfoot  
lest old authority reclaim the man,  
there lives – gathered, encoded and occulted –  
awareness of an awareness we suppress  
in adult claims and compacts; there persists 540  
the intimation of another order  
that is most intimate birthright of each self  
and yet admits the outsider, the stranger  
who with the mother stands in outer darkness  
beyond the firelit circle of the tribe.

Thus it is possible that in the obscuring  
of the mother's countenance, in the foreclosure  
of that space of solicitude in which  
we grew toward possibilities that could  
yet be attained, if we could but return  
to that space, and enlarge it – we have found 550  
the junction we were seeking, the departure  
from the true path, the great divide between  
our kind's ascent to within sight of wisdom  
and our descent through strife and mutual deafness  
toward the destruction of both earth and mind  
by motion ineluctable as the crawl  
of glaciers toward the sea in deepening cold,  
mechanical, beyond choice or encounter –  
save for this point at which the aeonic weight  
of our predicament bears ice-like down 560  
upon our brain, and shows itself to us  
as image and as situation, and  
therefore, perhaps, as choice. Although the choice  
be fore-cast in the vessels of the brain  
by heritage of matter, yet mind might –  
if mind has might to move the frames of matter  
by clinging to an image that is offered  
as a receptacle for spirit's power –  
oppose here to the press of time the foe

a force that comes from greater time the friend 570  
and get us over this hump in evolution  
we bang at, like a fly against the glass.  
O now if at the gates of human thought  
life pulses with necessity of making  
a loyalty to earth, which through some chink  
in the wall of our conditioning might draw  
the thread of our survival, there must be  
some new ordeal and rite of further passage,  
consummate in the mind, in mutual speech,  
in covenant, to break the tribal ring 580  
(already broken, yet incessantly  
forming again, in the void of resolution)  
— or to subsume, include it in a Ring  
of Rings, a Great Circle of Understanding  
to ring this globe, at last, with wisdom's might  
and by new-opened channels sublimate  
the forces in us that Creation wrong.

## Chapter 11

*Traces of the wisdom/community archetype in various traditions; development of this archetype in Western literature and in the Kabbala.*

We seem now to have found a precedent,  
a template for projection and construction  
of the great circle which we seek to draw,  
in the small world that beacons from far off  
as goal of all our quests after lost time:  
that world inhabited by only two,  
where mother is the source of life and love  
and language too, since from her lips the child  
learned the first names, whose magic was her wish  
to give what, in her judgment, might be given 10  
to keep him in the world and make him happy.  
Each I first knew itself as mother's Thou,  
the center of realities arranged  
within the force-field of a single care,  
a Providence, that had a human face.  
However fitfully that face appeared  
in mortal mother, being herself inflected  
by need, by an existence in the shadow  
of war, by rivalry that comes to all  
singular existence, nevertheless 20  
that world was there, the sun that lit it up  
the other's simple will that we might be;  
or if through deprivation known, then in  
our crying need that such a will should be.  
Singly we dwelt in that world, singly left  
and singly grieve it; to the singular heart  
the sirens pitch their call to reconstruct  
the archaic garden, enter it again,  
relearn or reinvent its ancient language,  
its knowledge that was blissful ignorance 30  
of alienness and death. But to reenter  
that world, as travelers back from history's roads,  
instructed, and accompanied by all  
who claim it – this would be the task, the art.

And are there precedents, not only in  
the archaeology of self and soul,

but in the external record of our race?  
 When, on those stages where the imaginations  
 of peoples caused the figures of their passions  
 to stalk as gods and heroes, have we seen 40  
 the sovereign of our early world, enlarged,  
 escaped from that far miniature sphere  
 and newly present, to-be-reckoned-with,  
 giving light to the counsels of her children  
 though grown beyond her care and fortified  
 by scorn against her interfering word?  
 Shall we not now ascend to culture's attic,  
 rummage through the capacious trunk that holds  
 the multifarious guises of our yearnings,  
 to see if there be aught not quite outworn 50  
 that might, refurbished for our circumstance,  
 help to *re clothe us in our rightful mind?*  
 Not "Magna Mater." What have we to do  
 with all that burgeoning of indiscriminate  
 birth, and death dealt with capricious hand,  
 oblivious to us, and representing  
 more a forgetfulness than a remembrance  
 of the intent informing gaze to which  
 the misty sight of infancy first cleared —  
 what are those offerings of wine and blood 60  
 to us, or the self-wounding ecstasies  
 that marred the body, and schooled not the mind?  
 And though that mother of the son we know of  
 (whom we see humbly bent above her infant,  
 then distanced by her grown child from the circle  
 of those who hear his word) appears inclined  
 to catch the massive inarticulate prayer  
 unwittingly composed of all the outcries  
 that rise from earth (like that Kuan-Yin revered  
 in Asia's realms), that feeling face seems vacant 70  
 of intellect that could devise an answer  
 and beam it back to us.

Yet fitfully  
 among the battling gods there have appeared  
 brief half-illuminations of an image  
 that half-invoked has waited in the shadows,  
 holding no philtres and no childbirth-spells  
 but counsel only. To the wisest king  
 Israel ascribes the verses that project her



against the background of the streets, in ancient  
 Jerusalem, building her house and sending 80  
 her maidens forth as messengers to men,  
 seen less than heard, a voice that keeps on calling  
 in the interhuman space, her habitat,  
 and not the forest or the field, although  
 she claims herself older than these, coeval  
 with the Creation, the design of God,  
 Who from the first envisioned, as His final  
 artwork, that harmony of human wills  
 that is wise conduct and good government.  
 And through the pages of that Book of Books 90  
 the form of Wisdom flickers, coalescing  
 with the image of that other, proud and desolate,  
 faithful and erring City, now rejected,  
 now redeemed, according as her children  
 fulfill, or not, the law of their Creator.  
 And not unkin to her, though alien –  
 projection of a picture-making mind –  
 was she, sprung full-armed from the chief-god's brow,  
 who kept the house at Athens, plied the shuttle  
 whenever shields hung idle, and meant inner 100  
 coherency, not warring wile alone,  
 so that by no mere happenstance the city  
 that bore her name still shines through history  
 as brightest beacon of enlightened thought.  
 In recent centuries when Enlightenment,  
 Progress, Democracy, were names of hope,  
 there rose again this figure, not a goddess  
 exactly, but a template in the mind  
 projected onto monument and coinage,  
 an image of the people and their freedom 110  
 as well as of their mutual boundeness  
 in love of commonality and justice.  
 Her counterparts appear wherever the tribe  
 recalls its common origin, the bonds  
 that draw them toward one center, felt sometimes  
 most in the loss. Among the bloody Incas  
 when the as-bloody Spaniard stooped upon  
 that fold of wolves, in Cuzco there was heard  
 a weeping of the mother of the Incas  
 for all her brood. Yet ever and again 120  
 her figure looms into a depth of being

beyond the nation and, entire, disowns  
strife-born division. Was not the descent  
of the first poet to the realm of death  
a quest for one whose name – Eurydice –  
once meant “Wide Justice” ? Was it not in that  
unnamed name old Sophocles called forth  
Antigone, true daughter of that king  
made wise by blindness and received at last  
by the great hidden mothers of all homeless 130  
into the source of light? Was she not theirs  
who by her act drew bounds to enmity,  
keeping the sacred threshold of the dead  
from martial trespass, and inspiring Haemon’s  
truth-speech appealing to authority  
beyond that will-to-power which would rule  
though in a desert made by its own rage...?  
And Black Elk, to whose people had appeared  
the woman in white buckskins as the bearer  
of the feathered pipe passed round among the speakers 140  
to bind them in a spell of mutual truth –  
he who perceived the Star of Understanding  
appearing in the morning sky surrounded  
by infant faces, souls of all the tribe –  
had stood in his great trance upon a peak,  
the “center of the earth” (but “everywhere  
is the center of the earth”), where he beheld  
“in a sacred manner the shape of all shapes  
as they must live together in one being”  
“in circles wide as daylight and as starlight” – 150  
had glimpsed, beyond the shadows of his tribe’s  
destiny, some ultimate hope for Earth.

But most among the peoples who begin  
their stories on the shores of that mid-sea  
where those three faiths from Father Abraham’s sowing  
rose to contend, the figure that we seek  
has walked a long and tortuous road. Perhaps  
from both of her first sightings, in Jerusalem  
and Athens, coalesced amid the roiling  
of mysteries in Rome’s harsh-ruled domain 160  
the doubly-exiled Hagia Sophia,  
First Thought of the Creator, that leapt forth  
from Him into the void and there gave birth

to the divisive powers that hold her captive,  
 they being ignorant of the Origin  
 and fain to hold themselves autonomous.  
 So far they thrust her down that she must enter  
 a female body, and from life to life  
 suffer humiliation in that shape,  
 as do her human children, soul by soul, 170  
 each birth a fall into a captive world.  
 Around this single petrifying insight  
 bordered and interwoven and shot through  
 with variation, counter-variation,  
 a writhing chevelure of myth and sect  
 was generated, and most various  
 conclusions drawn in act. Some blamed the Mother  
 and set out to undo the work of woman  
 by abstinence, or promiscuity  
 that blocked the gate of birth, counting it crime 180  
 to deliver further souls into the dungeon;  
 some sought for amulets that might procure  
 safe-conduct for their own souls past the Powers  
 that keep the threshold-gates between this world  
 and the transcendent timeless Dwelling-place;  
 others, perhaps, held hope for the redemption,  
 here, of an earthly Being. So the tale  
 is told, though by invidious pen, of Simon  
 Magus, who from a stew in Tyre (they say)  
 plucked one Helen and proclaimed her She 190  
 that shone in Troy, the exiled Mother wandering  
 through the long ages in degraded guise,  
 till rescued by himself, the incarnate Father!  
 And some, it may be, though the record here  
 is blotted, sought out women who appeared  
 to them as avatars and oracles —  
 who was Priscilla? what was she? a true  
 mirror of Holy Wisdom, or one more  
 orchestrator of impulse and illusion?  
 From out this chaos of inchoate form 200  
 no human figure steps, in whom the word,  
 the mother-word, appears to be incarnate;  
 and although fertile in phantasmagoric  
 cosmologies, the Gnostic vision scorned  
 fruitfulness of the flesh; so by the law  
 even of the Demiurge which they defied,

before the rising power of the Church  
militant and philoprogenitive  
that wild assortment of cenacles fell  
divided and self-slain. Yet, recrudescent, 210  
the heresy cropped up in Christian lands.  
Among the gentle Albigensians  
of southern France, where from the sun-warmed lyre  
the bards of langue d'oc drew forth the strain  
of courtly love, a charitable spirit  
moved the Perfecti, men and women both,  
to instruct the people in a faith unknown,  
expunged from human memory by the sword  
of Christendom, for which they were no match;  
but it is said that many a courting sigh 220  
addressed in verse to some high worldly dame  
flew past her to the Eternal Rose, that same  
Holy Wisdom, revered in open secret  
in the circle of her bards faithful to love.

Dante in youth, we know, was one of these;  
the poets of Provence, he owned, had taught him,  
who had so many teachers: Vergil, Homer,  
Maimonides, Aquinas, Ibn Arabi,  
Augustine and the founders of the orders. 230  
His brain, it seemed, had gathered all the lore  
a human mind could garner at that last  
instant when the exploding sphere of knowledge  
could fit the compass of one human brain,  
or seem to fit that compass. But above all  
his tutor's name was Exile. From the city  
where he had had the vision of a lady  
whom inspiration showed to him as Wisdom  
he was thrust out, to climb the steps of others'  
houses, and eat his bread with salt of tears.  
Thus wandering outside the pale, again 240  
that figure rose upon his inner sight  
as symbol of that vision of the whole  
which can be seen from outside all the frameworks  
convention and authority ordain,  
in that great night to which the shaman's soul  
through unrecorded ages has gone out.  
He looked upon the earth from outer space,  
lifted beyond it by Imagination,

drawn upward by the love – of what, or whom?  
 It little matters whether in the flesh 250  
 against the streets of Florence Beatrice  
 shone to the eyes of him who would become  
 master of love's inditers, or was merely  
 projected from the eye of the beholder  
 on some chance passerby, or empty space.  
 Her being was in that remembered ray  
 from childhood, filtered through the password lore,  
 the contraband, of poets masked as lovers;  
 her all-pervading presence made the world  
 take order, if but in the poet's thought. 260  
 The palaces of reason and belief  
 reared by Aquinas and Maimonides  
 on Aristotle's fundament, the courts  
 and galleries of legend and of law,  
 the gardens with their springs fed by who knows  
 what hidden streams of Kabbala that coursed  
 through Jewry's shunned but neighboring domain,  
 arrange themselves in avenues converging  
 upon her single figure, which at last  
 merges into the vision of the Rose, 270  
 the community of hope, which then in turn  
 dissolves as sight is focused in a Point  
 where energy from Outside all we know  
 pours in, in-forming: Source of which the poem  
 itself seems proof, radiant evidence  
 that an Intention bent the bow, and guides  
 Time's arrow in despite of dissolution.  
 For who could doubt Creation's energy  
 that worked here, summoned rhythm, rhyme and image  
 into one great word-crystal where all things 280  
 move and remain in motion as though seen  
 truly in time from vantage beyond time,  
 – as if Medusa's eyes could quicken life! –  
 and take their places in an order where  
 the global and the hierarchic seem  
 by a transcendent sortilege reconciled.  
 Uttermost miracle of human speech!  
 And yet ambiguous in final message,  
 or rather partly failing to transmit  
 the energy that wrought it: outwardly 290  
 bound by fear to inquisitorial doctrine

while studying to encompass, to englobe  
 cleric authority within the gaze  
 of poetry, whose insight would be law –  
 in vain, yet not in vain. No promised hero  
 appeared, the sword of Michael in his hand,  
 to cleanse the Tuscan cities from corruption,  
 nor yet did Florence, laying to its heart  
 the poem on which heaven and earth had worked,  
 cast cruelty out and welcome back the poet, 300  
 save as a monument to its own fame;  
 while in the reader's mind the Mediatrix  
 –Supernal presence more alive than life –  
 remains mere figment of the poet's craft,  
 while further generations praised the mind  
 that passed through the purifying fire of this  
 creation and yet left it in the world  
 as one more mark for human pride to aim at.  
 For of the poets his successors, most  
 essayed to rival his accomplishment 310  
 without acknowledging his inspiration,  
 and so invention darkened. Like the Archons  
 that pin Sophia down in Gnostic myth,  
 none deigned to be the offspring of the Mother  
 whose Father is the ultimate Source of all.  
 And therefore the epiphany established  
 no ritual, no law, no lineage  
 of bard and prophet constant to one thing:  
 beside the worshipped images this image  
 remains known and unknown, seen and unseen, 320  
 disbelieved, parodied and falsified,  
 now and then appearing in the darkened  
 mirror of a tragic plot that shows  
 the fate of Holy Wisdom upon earth  
 (that's Cordelia, that Eugenie  
 in Goethe's deepest play, *The Natural Daughter*,  
 forgotten in the shadow of his *Faust*),  
 yet always present where the childlike, clear  
 eye of an author opens on the world  
 and shows things in a light severe and kind, 330  
 as in the Mother's presence they might seem.  
 If there is freedom for us, then such sight  
 alone confers that virtue which alone  
 leads humans past the limit of their kind,

as Dante said: how needed in this hour,  
and how cast forth, even by those that cry  
for Justice, yet would force her to espouse  
each one his cause, that stamps the mind with slogans  
and blots the view of common consequence!

But we have sped on past the shape that stands 340  
scarcely defined as shape against that ground  
of light and shadow that is Kabbala.  
Here are no mythic deeds, no attributes,  
no speeches of a speaking Character,  
only a diagram of emanations  
out of an infinite transcendent Point  
that first emerges from the Infinite  
as Will that there should be a world, which then  
gives rise to Wisdom, Father of all things, 350  
in whom they are but hidden and implicit,  
whose flash illuminates the higher Mother,  
Binah, or Understanding, in whose womb  
Being defines, articulates itself  
yet without separation; here each soul  
of Israel has its root; and we may venture  
to see in that one volume, that one Shape  
which Dante and Black Elk could apprehend  
some shadowing of this sphere, where lives Delight,  
and which is called Repentance when the soul  
rises from tenebrous particular cares 360  
into the light of encompassing concern.  
It is this Higher Mother that gives birth  
to the qualities of Lovingkindness, Rigor,  
Compassion (which is also known as Beauty),  
Endurance and Acknowledgment (or Splendor)  
which go to make the Just Man, the Tzaddik,  
who is partner and foundation of the Kingdom,  
Malkhut, the Lower Mother, the Divine  
Presence. She is the lowest emanation,  
the one that has to do with human speech 370  
and the material world; she is the Congregation  
of Israel, exiled in a world estranged  
from its high Source, a world of separation  
and husks, and subject to contamination,  
yet, strangely, closest to the highest Crown;  
for the desire that drove Creation was

that spirit might have home in matter's region.  
It is this Emanation that is glimpsed,  
at times, by sages in a woman's form,  
as when the sight of a tall black-veiled figure 380  
weeping beside the Western Wall, made known  
the death of Rabbi Pinhas to his fellow;  
alien eyes perceived her as the vanquished  
Synagogue with her broken lance, even thus  
more beautiful than that victorious Church  
that on the Strassbourg portal looks so bold.

What glimpses have we now, amid the rubble  
left by the wars, the industrial waste and glitter,  
the poets prouder still of less and less,  
worshipping Dissolution, each a king 390  
or queen on his or her midden of words  
that do not mean, that point nowhere? Almost  
Rilke had seen her. Saw not her gestalt  
but the hollow of the world, the shadowy weft  
of correspondence and occult connection,  
the oneness that encompasses difference  
in a possible exactitude of structure  
which has its chemistry, its laws that might  
be learned, so as to make something of us,  
whereby the poet would become again 400  
the scientist of community. He saw  
almost this, but could not wholly see  
to call home the maternal Intellect  
into the center of the tapestry  
he wove at her instruction; in her place  
he saw his own eyes' blindness. After him  
another took the vigil, faithful son  
of mother murdered in the massive crime  
that put out Europe's brief candle of hope  
for slowly growing mercy and sweet reason 410  
lifting the world into the sphere of light.  
Into the heart of darkness, knowing that  
it was his blindness too, he stared and stared  
and saw through it and past it, to the Mother,  
his and not his, who mourns and meditates  
the fate of all Earth's children: humans, one  
by one, and beasts and growing things, and air,  
water and stone; and reached with sight unseeing



through and past her image to the Eternal  
 Will whose thought is form and by whose mercy 420  
 man might be workman once again in her  
 Earth-household. For which act the future tenants,  
 if there is any future for our speech,  
 will call him Master of the Hidden Name  
 and in the month when earth renews its green  
 will yearly mourn his solitude, his long  
 descent to madness and self-chosen death  
 in the years when the land of song lay waste  
 and word was powerless to breed true act,  
 yet hail the resurrection of the Imago 430  
 by whose light we shall see to work for good  
 while the earth holds its course around the sun  
 and the sun moves amid the other stars.  
 And not alone the name of Paul Celan  
 will shine in memory, but at his side  
 the other builders of the earth shall rise,  
 Teilhard, whose thought beheld the Noösphere,  
 Laura Reichenthal, whose tale foreshadows  
 the unity of world in that of word,  
 and Simone Weil, whose groping thought reached out 440  
 to the circumference of human caring,  
 and others still, throughout time's reach, who brought  
 each his own word (thus Mandelstamm) to build  
 the republic of true speech. Joined by our com-  
 prehension (as they were not, in a world  
 that fragments insight) in a single council,  
 they summon us to join them now in listening  
 for the biddings we must pledge to hear and do.  
 Now that our causes falter, may we turn  
 inward and backward, following the traces 450  
 such voices leave, back to the source of vision,  
 and from it follow its imperatives  
 forward and outward, to the world that must  
 be made, by new-forged will and minds conjoined.  
 It is a quest, a spiritual path  
 appropriate to an age that cannot find  
 its own face in the mirror of a future,  
 only, at first, a dark and roiling chaos  
 whose darkness deepens as we scan its further  
 dimensions, till the clocks stop and we stumble 460  
 into the dead zone of a silent After.

Yet we are not alone here. Eyes adjusting  
upon the lunar regolith discover  
the footprints of Black Elk, of Paul Celan,  
heirs to extinction, bearers of new life;  
and lifting up our eyes we see an Earth  
of vacant and yet habitable future  
which we may presently proceed to furnish  
with salvage of our multifarious past.  
For in the dead zone of that silent After  
whatever spoke of a reality  
beyond our history's dividing struggle  
is gathered once for all; insight and custom,  
spare parts of disarticulated systems,  
from out which rubble the discerning eye  
She lends us, and the gathering hand She guides,  
selects what yet may serve, arranges it  
again into a pattern that could hold us.  
So Wisdom calls us to rebuild Her house  
and smiles with us as things fall into place.

470

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## Chapter 12

*Rootedness of the global vision in the tradition of Israel, and need of reconciling the two. Uniqueness of the Sinai encounter; history of the people Israel; its form of existence; relevance of its teachings to humanity at large; Israel and its land as microcosm of humanity and earth. Relation of this tradition to the maternal archetype.*

Yet as we set our foot upon the path  
to which this juncture's signpost seems to point us,  
we sense, as from the side, another figure  
rising, and to our inner ear arrives  
a voice as of misgiving or rebuke,  
claiming possession of much that we sought  
to drag as stones into our new foundation:  
It is the archetype of Israel  
arising here with no unrightful claim. 10  
In seeking to unravel Earth's enigma  
we have paged through the discontinuous  
record of human seeking, and have found  
here and there intimations; much has come  
from Hellas which we could not choose but hear;  
yet the most, and the unifying insight –  
the hope of covenant, the invocation  
of some Transcendence for the sake of life –  
was taken, after all, from Israel's store.  
Messenger-nation always under fire 20  
(and most intensely from derivative  
constructions that purported to improve  
upon their prior covenant with the Maker)  
yet, under fire, still deepening its knowledge  
of Heaven's ways, as yet to be imparted –  
and can we think that that they have not in store  
much more that would be needful for our purpose?  
If from the wide circumference of Creation  
we seemed to hear a voice that bore instructions,  
must what we heard not seek corroboration,  
must we not ask a blessing, from the holders, 30  
by right of precedence and of persistence  
in tenancy, of title to that stock  
of hope on which we'd set about to graft  
a scion taking chiefly from itself?

But here indeed we venture on a path  
 no less mined with anxieties than that  
 which led to recognition of the Mother –  
 not more entangled are Medusa’s snakes  
 than the objections which against this people’s  
 patent of primogeniture are lodged, 40  
 from snarling epithets that from the slime  
 of ethnic hatred, which the inheritance  
 of tribal enmity has caused to settle  
 at the bottom of the human disposition,  
 rise up against all aliens, and most  
 against the ones who would be known as chosen,  
 through wild fantastic calumnies and blame,  
 to those objections where the intellect  
 appears to judge impartially, as severed  
 from boundeness to Israel or its foes, 50  
 though often not untinged by animus  
 that veils itself in objectivity,  
 be the gravamen of the accusation  
 a violation of the general justice  
 or conflict with the findings of our science;  
 and not infrequently the accusing voices  
 rise from among the children of this people  
 pried from adherence by the weariness  
 of being in eternal opposition!  
 Spirit that has inspired this writing’s quest, 60  
 if to the Holy One of Israel  
 and his Shekhinah, such be not unpleasing,  
 not unforbidden, guide these fearful steps  
 in a mined land among so many fences,  
 across a rubble-field where words are stones  
 apt to be flung where one least wills to wound  
 and shades of ancient accusations hiss  
 for silence. Let me find words that cry out  
 against invidious use, if such there are  
 in humankind’s strife-fashioned lexicon, 70  
 and if this be impossible, then let  
 no eye survey these pages; let them rest  
 unopened save to the eternal Eye  
 of this world’s Author, to Whom all intents  
 are known, nor can be veiled by any feint.

Perhaps from the perspective of the way  
 that we have traveled, we can now discern

the outlines of a destiny germane  
to an inquiry which we had believed  
the child of an unprecedented hour. 80  
By the apparition of the disk of Earth  
we saw ourselves summoned beyond this sphere,  
to take, so far as given to mortal mind,  
a distance from the human, to survey  
our constitution and predicament,  
hoping to find some point on which our will  
could lean, so as to turn aside the wheel  
of Earth's apparent fate.

Suchlike excursions

to the Outside were plotted, as we saw,  
in the bard's journey to the spirit-world, 90  
of which the fullest testament was left  
by Alighieri, he whom exile served  
to lift him toward that highest vantage-point  
from which he seems to see in single vision  
the order and the form of all Creation  
and last, the infinite Point from which outstreams  
that Whole and all its intervolving forms.  
Others before and after him have found  
their ways out of our coil, have seen their visions,  
although the several visions have not added 100  
to the One Vision Earth now seems to summon.  
O that Earth could acquire a thunderous voice  
like that which rolled from Sinai long ago,  
too mighty to withstand, and gave commandments  
not to the solitary but to all  
together, wrapped up in one consciousness,  
and yet to each in his own secret heart  
for the walking of his road as one of many  
many, of which the nation's path is braided.  
O for such voice, whose swelling waves would lift 110  
each off the shoals of his or her resistance  
and make each eager for the work at hand!  
But to restage that scene which Israel  
recalls as fountainhead of all its labors  
exceeds the power, though the wish be great,  
of finite beings, who can but recall it;  
and as biologists reckon that just once  
— at one flash in the unimaginable  
continuum of immemorial time —

out of inanimate matter coalesced 120  
 the self-transforming pattern that is life,  
 even so, we see, once and once only stood  
 a people face to face with the Transcendent,  
 the Ineffable, whence stems all power to make—  
 only once, and only to one people  
 did Being's Author turn with His command  
 to make this planet home to truth and justice  
 and to compassion, fosterers of life,  
 did Heaven's will-to-unity address  
 itself, not as Prime Mover of a world 130  
 determined in its course, but as the Source  
 of freedom, which the Law was meant to guard;  
 once, only once, a human aggregate  
 was shaped as vessel to contain that Will,  
 and thus a higher life made possible  
 than that of self, or even that of tribe,  
 for Israel was given its patch of ground,  
 the site on which their Temple should be built,  
 in trust for all the family of Man.  
 In looking back upon our course of thought 140  
 we see how much has flowed to us, by channels  
 direct or indirect, from Israel's source!  
 A teaching not repaid with loyalty  
 bears bitter fruit at last. The loyal student  
 alone makes contact with the teacher's source,  
 which, opened thus, may flow to him as well.

To broach this is to open up a door  
 that gives upon a history separate  
 from that of Earth although therein included  
 and in some way including it as well, 150  
 the small containing that which seemed the greater.  
 Let us then follow, by the light of Earth,  
 the road this people traces from its start  
 in Ur Kasdim, one seat of Empire's might,  
 whence Abraham was beckoned forth, detached  
 from the conditionings of state and culture  
 and kin, and from all temporary gods—  
 the exile or the exodus inscribed,  
 then, in the first step on that road. And once  
 again, when it was promised that despite 160  
 a barren wife, his line would be continued,

he was led out, the Midrash says, beyond  
 the stars, beyond the sphere where fate has power,  
 to see that destiny can be reversed.  
 And even the circumcision and the binding  
 of Isaac, which appal the natural heart,  
 seem meant as signs that not from that heart flows  
 the more-than-life by which this people lives.  
 Yet as the goal of that exorbitant journey  
 not heaven but one tract of earth was set — 170  
 that spot of ground to which this people never  
 resigned the claim which it maintains today  
 — so that, for all that Israel has given  
 to humankind, the quieting of title  
 to that small doubly-hallowed spot of ground  
 would be a modest recompense enough  
 and sign to all, that in the ground of Earth  
 Transcendence must, and will, confirm itself.  
 Yet exile even from that land was also  
 part of the story: upon Abraham 180  
 a horror of great darkness fell, portending  
 captivity in Egypt, which the sages  
 portray as kingdom of Determinism,  
 from which no slave escaped, whose might seemed anchored  
 in the natural world, as we indeed have seen  
 how in the soil of natural selection  
 the tyrannies that menace Earth, that hold  
 hostage our power to repair, take root.  
 The plagues of Egypt: we ascribe the crumbling  
 of the natural world which we observe today 190  
 not to the hand of God but to the workings  
 of natural law (administered by us);  
 yet if this demonstration we are seeing  
 of the nullity of life that is no more  
 than life, can flash a meaning to our brain,  
 then something like the great release recalled  
 in the Song at the Red Sea, might yet bequeath  
 a new triumphal song to generations!  
 What pity, that to hearers not akin  
 to Isaac, who consented to be bound, 200  
 that scene of liberation has betokened  
 relief from outward fetters, but not yet  
 release from the compulsions that recapture,  
 again, again, our liberation movements.

The road that leads not from the ruined land  
and Sundered sea to the mountain of encounter  
with the eternal Will which to our life  
gives law and form,— leads only back to Egypt.

So far the archetypal tale, to which  
mainly this people's memory bears witness, 210  
inscribed on all their scrolls, though widely scattered  
since their first kingdom fell; its confirmation  
today comes not from stones, but from our hearts,  
so far as these are something more than stone.  
But gradually now the stones begin  
to show their traces, though almost each trace  
beset by doubts impartial, more and less,  
down to that malice which today would blot  
the name and place of Israel from Earth's soil!  
The Jordan crossed, they entered history: 220  
we hear, we trace, the conquest of a land,  
the struggles toward the founding of a kingdom  
wherein the vision that had brought them there,  
now fostered and unfolded by the prophets,  
wrestled with pressure from surrounding powers  
that sent the dark of fear and in that dark,  
where the ground of commitment was obscured,  
voices that bade them turn to lesser things,  
till that defeat by Israel lamented  
each year upon the night the Temple fell — 230  
receded into memory, yet there  
still radiates. Nor was the nation sunk  
in the oblivion that overtook  
the peoples whom the Assyrians expunged  
a century or so before their empire  
dissolved beneath the onslaught of another.  
This ancient miracle the archaeologists  
confirm: Sennacherib's defeat, when he  
had shut up Hezekiah like a bird  
in Judah's last beleaguered citadel, 240  
Jerusalem, but that a sudden plague  
recorded on his tablets as recounted  
in the scroll of Isaiah, turned him homeward,  
and thus the embassy of Israel,  
the signature of God upon the world,  
was not effaced — and has not been effaced,



although the script be darkened by disasters.  
Nor seems it less miraculous, although  
we cannot find the spot at which the finger  
of Providence was thrust into the web 250  
of circumstance, that after certain decades  
of Babylonian exile, Babel's empire  
crumbled, as empires have a way of doing  
and its successor authorized return  
of captive peoples to their native ground;  
it is not chance that from this juncture stems  
the scroll of Esther, where the people's doom  
is thwarted, true, by cunning and intrigue,  
but by so frail a plot, that had the strength  
of the Unseen not reinforced its threads 260  
it scarcely would have held. The sense was gained  
of hidden miracles, where each detail  
appears explainable, but not the whole  
(a sense so fundamental to our reading  
of all our planet's immemorial scroll).  
And it is said, that upon that deliverance  
the people who at Sinai had been forced  
by the overwhelming evidence of God  
took on the Torah of their own free will  
a second time, persuaded by the sense 270  
of Providence, though hidden, in the world.  
There have been other miracles, long marked  
as "little Purims" in their congregations,  
else were the light of Israel long extinguished.

In the return from Babylon, not all  
returned. Many remained there, or in Egypt,  
which had received them in the days of ruin.  
For these, their homeland was the scroll they carried,  
remembrance, and a setting-down of roots  
into soils that uneasily received them. 280  
Diaspora had begun – the being here  
yet there, and not securely anywhere –  
that state, so questionable, in which perhaps  
foundations of the global mind are set.  
And those who, few and poor, returned to Zion  
shored up Jerusalem's walls, rebuilt their Temple,  
or a poor semblance of what once had been,  
founded a commonwealth at war with neighbors,

dependent on an empire's distant power. 290  
 The empire changed again, as empires will.  
 Great Alexander came, and left behind  
 that universal culture where the reason  
 of Greek philosophy kept house with gods  
 of every stamp and provenance – there were  
 some emperors who ranged themselves among them –  
 and only Israel with their only God  
 declined the invitation to the feast  
 and so became exception to the rule  
 of tolerance, incurring a decree 300  
 that sought to ban the rite of circumcision,  
 the study of the Law, which stamped this people  
 unique amid so much diversity.  
 The priestly Maccabees then started up:  
 hands that had sacrificed now grasped the weapons  
 of war and, few, maintained against the many  
 their cause, became the founders of a kingdom  
 which foundered all too soon, the spirit's fire  
 that had burned long enough to light the battle  
 quenched in a swamp of faction and corruption,  
 and Roman rule began, from which they date 310  
 the longest, hardest exile, not yet ended.  
 But while the Second Temple stood, once more  
 rebuilt in splendor by a puppet-king,  
 around it surged, in clash and confluence,  
 currents of influence and fidelity  
 sorting to sects of multifarious form  
 of which the Pharisees proved most enduring,  
 holding themselves aloof from the ambiance  
 yet taking from it what could further nourish  
 their ancient teaching in new fields of time. 320  
 From Greek philosophy they took the habit  
 of moderation and deliberation  
 in councils of the wise which substituted  
 for prophecy, which, they perceived, no longer  
 could pierce the turbid air of a world bowed  
 beneath the shadow of the hand of Force;  
 they thought not for the sake of thought alone  
 but for the sake of life to be continued,  
 and in this light they read and explicated  
 the ancestral scroll, and on its fundamental 330  
 imperatives set many further courses

to fortify a house of good proportion  
 where amid storms of time the human being  
 could dwell in equanimity apprenticed,  
 still, to the One who made the world for good.  
 These friends, for so they also called themselves,  
 by the practice and example of their teaching  
 made friends of many strangers, moved to join them,  
 although not all of these could cross the threshold  
 of separation from their kin, could heft 340  
 the weight of obligations that make sacred  
 the life of Israel, or think of braving  
 the rite of circumcision, to the child  
 a quick and unanticipated pang,  
 a hedge of agony to the adult,  
 for which no anodyne could then be offered.  
 To such the sages spoke of seven laws  
 given through Noah to all humankind  
 after the deluge brought by human crime:  
 to keep these laws, with all their implications, 350  
 and cleave to Israel as friends and pupils,  
 would be a meritorious thing, no less,  
 perhaps, than keeping all of Israel's charge.  
 Nor proved it easier; for second fiddle,  
 as has been said half-jestingly of late,  
 is much the hardest instrument to play.  
 So it might chance that among this penumbra  
 of Israel's community, a doctrine  
 that claimed authority from Israel's mandate  
 yet nullified the rites of Israel 360  
 and promised individual salvation  
 upon condition more of faith than practice  
 found favor, as indeed it came to please  
 the bitterest foes of Israel, the Romans,  
 by whom the Second Temple was destroyed  
 and from Jerusalem her children swept.  
 At what point in that history of schism  
 and on what base of fact the accusation  
 took shape, that Israel's teachers had connived  
 at the death of one his followers deified— 370  
 the true tale, or a tale that satisfies  
 all hearers, is unlikely to be told;  
 only that since that story was inscribed  
 in a new scripture stamped with Empire's seal,

the Jews subsisted underneath a sinister  
sign of pariah-hood, a capital sentence  
that might at any hour be carried out.

We have been shown the parting of three ways  
whereby two prospered at the first's expense.  
Between those two great shadows, which seem strangely 380  
cast by the light that shines within this people –  
the light Moshe saw in the bush that burned  
and yet was not consumed – they lived, now driven  
from one into the other, thriving here  
better than there, or better there than here.  
Though defeat had deprived them of their kingdom,  
they were not parted from the vision of it;  
and though uprooted from its native ground  
the ancient stem still put forth branch and leaf,  
as though upturned and rooted now in heaven, 390  
in the image of the Temple that had hovered  
over the earthly Temple and its ruin,  
waiting the hour when it would redescend  
and be once more the house of prayer for all.  
The sages went on reading, through all storms,  
by exile's lamp, the script upon the stone,  
the Law which their forefathers had accepted,  
not understanding yet, but pledged to act  
in the belief that they would understand.  
Indeed the acting of that ancient pledge 400  
instructed them, as history and encounter  
inflected now the tablets' silent voice,  
added crowns to the letters, glossed the words,  
inserted notes to notes on notes, and opened  
windows on stories which a stranger's eye  
resting upon the text would not surmise,  
even embroidered it with threads acquired  
in dealings with the neighbors, whose best wisdom  
they did not scorn, but wove into their fabric.  
The record of discussion and decision, 410  
Mishna and then Gemara, kept at first  
in memory, then written down, became  
foundation and first course of commentaries  
that fence the text from rash interpretation  
and at the same time deepen the perspectives  
that open for the scholar from each word.

From Aristotle came the architecture  
 of thought the great Maimonides rebuilt  
 on Israel's ground; and no one rightly knows  
 at which points first the subterranean waters 420  
 that surface in the Kabbala arose –  
 whether drawn up by Plato and Plotinus  
 and coursing through the Gnostics' braided channels  
 to the broken cisterns of the Occitans  
 and thence to Israel's vessels, as some have it,  
 or tasted by Akiba and his colleagues  
 who dared to tread the ground of Paradise,  
 and then by bar Yochai, at deepest source.  
 But in Provence, in Spain and in Safed  
 the multifoliate rose of Kabbala 430  
 unfolded, mystery on mystery,  
 stair upon stair in the abyss of heaven,  
 yet rooted still in the eternal Law,  
 on which the mystics pondered as before;  
 proposing their own versions of the code  
 informed by their perception of the depths,  
 beholding with profoundest inner sight  
 the flow of emanation from the Source  
 that is both Nought and Infinite, through the basins  
 of ten Sfirot, down to the dark domain 440  
 of matter's limitations and concealments –  
 structure that also serves the soul to ascend,  
 uplifting the world with it, toward its source.  
 As scientists who split the hidden atom  
 produced great changes in the evident world,  
 they hoped through knowledge of the hidden forces  
 to mend the breaches in Creation  
 so as to raise the fallen and dispersed  
 Shekhinah, and restore Her to the One.  
 Through all these studies, over generations, 450  
 an intellectual continent has grown,  
 scarce visited by travelers from abroad,  
 shaping the studious minds as it was shaped –  
 minds that could hold great volumes, and could tell you  
 whether a word is found in them or not,  
 minds that could answer questions from the depths  
 of centuries' learning, and that with the masters  
 of yore discoursed as with their neighboring friend.  
 Their heights and depths we can as little measure

as we can grasp the distance to the stars; 460  
doubt not that from such wisdom issued counsels  
that steered the nation through most perilous straits  
and that such power of concentration, deeper  
than counsel even, served them to repel  
waves that would have expunged them altogether,  
even while around this people swirled the tempest  
of calumny and misappropriation,  
exerting at the fringes of the people  
a pull that has drawn forth so many a one  
who came to the world with universal dreams. 470  
From the ancient core of faith it seems that fragments  
keep spalling off, to work in the world at random,  
for good or ill according as the currents  
that circulate in the world at large impel them,  
as time and time again the world has snatched  
at Israel's gift, and torn it in the snatching.  
Thus, lately, Paul Celan, who tried to sow  
in exile's poisoned soil the seed of hope,  
failing, at last, to bind the souls he prayed to  
into the world-wide ring he sought to draw, 480  
and himself faltering, being unsustained,  
far from the matrix of that ancient life  
to which he owed those sinews of his mind  
that could so far reach out, so almost hold;  
and Simone Weil and Laura Reichenthal,  
likewise from that same root and matrix severed  
whose thought toward the circumference of the Whole  
likewise stretched out and listened for commands,  
in acting which they seem like novice players  
who stumbled on the stage, leaving behind 490  
a ring of speeches mingling deepest meaning  
with as profound confusion, and a trail  
of deeds where chaos more than order reigned.

But through the ages, though its outward growth  
was often checked, the people grew within  
the form first cast in that supreme encounter,  
a form where life and text were intertwined  
inseparable; where each one that was born,  
lived, bore, begot, and died, lives not his life  
or hers alone, but that of Israel, 500  
in each day's prayer presenting the petitions

of the whole people, whose desire has not  
shifted or swerved amid the shifting patterns  
that on time's surface ripple and disperse.  
Among these students of the wise (for so  
they called themselves, each generation looking  
upward to the preceding one, that stood  
closer to Sinai on the steps of time)  
a hoard of precious apothegms is treasured,  
indeed, made part of prayer: these recommend 510  
the virtues that sustain community  
and regulate those movements of the heart  
which could, unchecked, unlink the generations,  
give controversy license to tear down  
the canopy of comradeship which solely  
shelters from exile's unrelenting weather.  
At each week's close the Sabbath, without walls  
or roof of wood or stone, gathers them in  
to a world where strife and grief have no admittance.  
Then lights are lit that signify a light 520  
that shows the world from one end to the other.  
The family assembles at the table  
with places laid for guests who may appear,  
come from afar, yet welcomed here as kin.  
Yearly at earth's release from winter's bonds  
the tale of Pesach rivets time, returns  
those living now to the primordial scene  
of liberation. And upon this follows  
the barley-offering and the ascending count  
of nine and forty days up to the night 530  
and day that once again evokes the Voice  
the people saw from underneath the mountain.  
That interim – what meanings, over time,  
have poured into the vessel of its counting!  
Akiba's students died then, it is told,  
because they failed to honor one another,  
and this is given as reason for the mourning,  
or muting of rejoicing, that ensues  
upon the celebration of the seder;  
and it is also said: the barley, food 540  
for animals, betokens the rough soul  
which toward the meeting must be purified.  
And since the fragrance of the Kabbala  
over the congregation wafted forth,

each day is given to one combination  
of two of those Sfirot which represent  
both emanations of supernal Will  
out of the Infinite toward finite being  
and traits each self must foster in itself  
to lift our being toward the Infinite, 550  
till the last day, Malkhut within Malkhut,  
that images perfection of the people  
and of each soul within it, as a vessel  
shaped to receive the infinite decree.  
And in those days they also reperuse  
those chapters of the sayings of the Fathers  
composed upon the nightfall of this last  
long exile, and still legible as manual  
of intellectual community.

This, then, the season that commemorates 560  
the grant of human freedom and the acceptance  
of the conditions for its preservation—  
time of exuberance which yet is checked  
by the clearing-out of leaven, by the muting  
of music and the putting-off of marriage  
in mourning and in sober calibration  
of the great work that still remains to do.  
But at the fall of the year, when light retracts,  
just then they celebrate the world's creation 570  
and seek to mend such flaws as they have caused,  
to reconcile themselves with the Creator  
and bring down blessing for the coming year.  
This done, they build their shelter whose sparse thatch  
admits the starlight, yet which has outlasted  
the tempests and the overtowering halls.  
Its fragile walls, reared and dismantled yearly,  
contain the world, extend an invitation  
to all Earth's peoples, though acceptance tarry.

If thus, by study, we have penetrated 580  
some way into the forecourts of this form,  
then as if from within we hear the voices  
that rise to question or oppose the claim  
Israel makes to represent the cause  
of humankind and of our planet Earth.  
If gathered and presented at the bar  
in one brief by the attorney for denial,



the answer to our pleadings thus might sound:  
 "How can the world take as a path to peace  
 this ancient scroll that speaks so much of war,  
 condones, enjoins, the slaughter of whole peoples, 590  
 of dissidents and deviants? Admitted  
 that such instructions were not carried out  
 by the bearers of the scroll in recent times,  
 yet the instructions still are on the books  
 and liable to find executors.  
 Less heavily, yet heavily enough  
 weigh the affronts this text and its tradition  
 of exegesis offers to our reason,  
 schooled as we are by science which is pledged  
 to an impartial sifting of the data 600  
 and casts a cold eye on the claims of faith.  
 If the accounts of those first seven days,  
 of Noah's deluge, now appear to us  
 at light-years' distance, shrunk to seem no more  
 than nursery tales told to mind's infancy;  
 if the exodus of Israel from Egypt  
 has left scant tracks upon the desert floor;  
 if to the literary critic's eye  
 the sacred text seems not like something given  
 all in one breath in one unique encounter 610  
 but rather like a thing of patches, each  
 composed in its own time, to its own purpose,  
 and at some unknown moment stitched together —  
 In light of all this, are the *quia absurdums*  
 — those ritual humblings of the mother-wit  
 that test the loyalty of the adherent —  
 in this faith less absurd than in another?  
 And even leaving all of this aside —  
 what counsel has this teaching for the earth  
 now, when the whole complexity of matter 620  
 has risen up, challenging human law  
 to tame its consequences which subvert  
 not just the natural and the social fabric  
 but the coherency of mind itself?  
 Amid the technological tsunami  
 what can the study of minute details  
 of sacrifices long since discontinued,  
 the finest points of dietary laws  
 and Sabbath-keeping, benefit the creatures

our enterprises menace with extinction, 630  
the forests devastated, and the masses  
yoked to or trampled by invention's pace?  
What use, indeed, are all these ritual laws,  
how helpful to the enterprise of taming  
self-interest and aggression to the bridle  
of altruism and constructive action?  
Many have suffered; what, more than all others,  
are the sorrows of this one small group to Earth?"

We hear this; but we also now can hear  
an answer from within: "Concede the harm 640  
our word has authorized when snatched from us,  
stripped of that shielding of deliberation  
our sages placed around it (though the hordes  
that ravaged earth in ignorance of our script  
required no such permission, nor do those  
now, who disclaim inheritance from us);  
concede at once the most reductive findings  
of spade, computer, textual critique  
(though not the calumnies that would efface 650  
our very rootedness in Israel's earth) —  
but ask yourself: had God begun his teaching  
with quarks and particles, would all the time  
that has elapsed since His 'In the beginning'  
have brought Him to the topic of our being,  
still less our tasks as keepers of the Earth?  
Man lives not by the bread of fact alone  
which, served in place of the soul's truth, is stone.  
Just as computers have not written poems  
(nor will), so science has no algorithm  
to form a human conscience, without which 660  
to speak of remedies for Earth is idle.  
For what is all the structure of our Law,  
with its provisions, some of which your reason  
accedes to more than others, but a shelter  
for that which is most needful, relevant  
indeed, to all concerns this time propounds:  
the I which can reflect the Infinite,  
the self that is the image of its Maker  
and holder of His power to repair?  
You ask what relevance have ritual laws 670  
to the keeping of our duties toward our fellows,

not asking why the people that endeavors  
 to keep such regulations, have been known  
 for mutual aid and kindness toward the stranger;  
 reckoning without that impulse to transgress,  
 that taste for stolen waters, which will ever  
 mock those who think to limit prohibition  
 to what is harmful on its face, who see  
 no need for any hedge within the bearable.

One day in seven, those who keep our Law 680  
 may touch no writing-tool, may watch no screen,  
 may neither buy nor sell, are thus detached  
 from those devices that outwit their framers,  
 dragging attention out to nothingness,  
 from calculations of the marketplace  
 into which the requirements of the Whole  
 are seldom factored. Those who see constraint here  
 lose consciousness of that to which rebellion  
 delivers them: the Egyptian servitude

of days, of weeks unmarked by pause for rest! 690  
 You hail the objectivity of Science,  
 when not declaring God is Love alone,  
 or seeking mystic ecstasies that leave  
 the world and all its problems far below;  
 we own the objectivity of Judgment,  
 though knowing well it is a perilous word  
 which human creatures may not lightly wield  
 and yet may not refuse to hear forever.

If there's a sign that human piety 700  
 is something greater than the naked creature's  
 plea to be spared the looming fate of death  
 and consequences of its mortal blunders,  
 then most in our acknowledgment of Judgment  
 such proof is seen. For thereby we arise  
 from the strait bounds of our self-interest  
 to contemplate the Whole and to acknowledge  
 our part in what is needful to repair.

It is to this that we commit ourselves 710  
 in study, with the hope of understanding  
 what is required of us by those commands  
 which before understanding we accepted,  
 and in this find delight, such as is found  
 in pleasing the Beloved, but untasted  
 by those who think to sever love from law.

“Would that the lesson could at last be learned,  
 the world at last accept our invitation,  
 take on – not the six hundred and thirteen  
 commandments that make sacred Israel’s life,  
 but just the seven laws which ramify  
 with myriad implications from God’s charge 720  
 to Noah, and if widely laid to heart  
 may yet arrest the fall toward dissolution.  
 To wit: acknowledge that there is a God,  
 a high creating Will that makes for order  
 and harmony, not mere material cause;  
 and curse Him not, despair not of the workings  
 of Providence toward better and not worse;  
 treat human life as sacred, and restrain  
 those who cannot respect it; keep your hands  
 from misappropriation; treat as sacred 730  
 the bond of man and woman, which alone  
 reflects the wholeness of the human being  
 made in God’s image; use no cruelty  
 toward other sentient beings; and establish  
 just government in the places where you dwell.  
 This teaching Grotius had heard, who framed  
 the thought of International Law, to bind  
 the nations in a covenant of peace,  
 which time and time again has been attempted  
 yet without thanking Israel, nor staying 740  
 to hear the further counsel of our teachers –  
 might it succeed, were this ingredient added?  
 Not light this charge, but in it there is nothing  
 that does not stand to Universal Reason  
 which may, perhaps, with Israel’s blessing, find  
 its counsels deepened, and its hand more steady,  
 more careful, for the work that’s to be done.  
 One spoke of ‘universal parenthood’  
 as a response to Earth’s necessity;  
 surely its seed is found in our commitment 750  
 to raising generations toward the knowledge  
 that clarifies the will and lights the way  
 for good intentions.”

Still the skeptic voice  
 rejoins: “What pledge have we, that a tradition  
 so bound to precedent, can bring forth answers

to this time of unprecedented questions?"

In the silence following upon that question  
rises the figure of a bearded man  
with kindly eyes beneath a tall fur hat  
and with the poet-dreamer's cast of countenance, 760  
and thus addresses us: "Israel's God  
is the source of the universe's life,  
of all creative powers, and so also  
of human power to make and to repair.  
That power is bestowed on those who rise  
out of their limited circle of concerns,  
returning to the greater Understanding.  
Scattered through space and time are men and women  
who made this journey singly; only once  
a people found that way and pledged to it 770  
their future life, which was thereby made sacred.  
Not smoothly from the mount that road has led.  
For when the voice of God had ceased to speak,  
the sufferings of existence in the world  
took up the teacher's task, through years of exile.  
Exile has purified the people's soul  
while narrowing its vision to the four  
cubits of halakhah, the circle drawn  
around this people's life, to keep life in  
against the harshness of the outer world. 780  
And even in this late return to Zion  
under so many nations' envious eyes  
constriction came with us; we are divided  
between those who cast off our sacred teaching  
and seek to be a nation like all others  
and those who will not let the circle widen  
again, to take in all the multifarious  
questions a nation-state today must answer,  
let alone one that bears the hope of Earth.  
And yet with independence, prophecy 790  
must once again arise, and make this nation  
the mirror where the world-soul shall behold  
itself in all its universal scope,  
in childhood's freshness and the strength of youth."

Attentive to this interchange, the mind  
that seeks to mend the earth, now entertains

the thought that maybe we have reached the goal  
of our quest for the bridge that from the smaller  
circle of mind, leads outward to the great.  
In all codes there is something arbitrary, 800  
in that of life no less than in all others;  
and arbitrary, too, perhaps the choice  
of a chosen people; yet that choice enabled  
the shaping of that people as a vessel  
that long has fostered life against all odds  
and where we can begin to see contained,  
prefigured, the great form in which we seek  
to comprehend the destiny of Earth.  
So that the soul of the wide world, if soul  
indeed it has, must see itself penumbra 810  
of Israel's collective soul, must build  
its house around that central hearth of hope,  
and see a Providence for itself as well  
in that which brought the Universal Nation  
home, when this Earth so sorely needs a home.  
And as we read by Earthlight Israel's script,  
may it not be that in our voice an echo  
returns from matter's alienated realm  
toward the one central Point and Source of all  
and, like the mirrored image in friend's eye 820  
something come clear for Israel as well?  
This precious spot of ground: may it become  
a microcosm of the Earth as whole;  
may its true borders, recognized by all,  
be the seed-crystal of a world-wide peace,  
and may the world-tree in its soil take root!

Let us then bring to consciousness those gifts  
which from the outset have sustained our quest,  
beginning with the *tselem elokim*,  
the semblance in our kind of a Creator 830  
Who made the world and called it good and yet  
left it imperfect, for us to complete.  
To shield that image in ourselves, becomes  
the central task toward which we seek to arrange  
the structure of society, supporting  
the mother's care, the commitment of the father  
to the one bond in which the human image  
is made complete, and tender life sustained;

the matrix of community, too lightly  
at industry's instruction disassembled, 840  
perhaps could be replanted by some means;  
and round all such protections we must build  
the fence of law. Not legislation solely  
but precept daily learned and pondered over –  
the law of Noah, with all implications  
and all that may pertain to upright conduct  
in the vast treasuries of Israel's lore.

Already Jeremiah, long ago,  
discerned the crookedness of the human heart, 850  
which generations of the sages strove  
to straighten. And shall not those newer findings  
that show us the constraints that have inflected  
and still inflect our actions, now be spliced  
into that ancient inquiry conducted  
always with the intention to arrive  
not only at objective understanding  
but at some insight that brings remedy?

Such inquiry would certainly arrive  
at the necessity of reaffirming 860  
marriage, as reuniting the two halves  
of the Divine Image, as middle way  
between denial of the generative  
impulse, and use of it for selfish ends.

Marriage! that partnership of enterprise  
and nurture, that has given childhood space  
to grow and to learn trust! how undermined  
through the promotion of mere transient pleasure  
by those who will not know that if the act  
in which a human life originates 870  
be not held sacred, life itself becomes  
a thing of little worth. Could this be seen  
clearly again, how much could be repaired!

The individual mind, which is the key  
and mirror to the wholeness of the world –  
shall it not see itself in Abraham,  
who with his naked eye saw through the idols  
of Ur Kasdim to the Master of the World  
and so became forefather to the nation  
who made the trek from Egypt to Sinai  
and settled in the land that must become 880

the talisman of freedom for the world?  
Nor was he ever only for himself:  
in parleying for Sodom he was admitted  
to the counsels of a universal justice.  
The covenant of circumcision, given  
to him and his alone, has yet become  
in the universal mind a metaphor  
for the check the vital impulse must accept  
that life may grow into the shape desired  
by the Creator, needed by Creation; 890  
likewise that dreadful almost-sacrifice  
may be interpreted as the surmounting  
even of that solicitude that *my*  
progeny live, whatever comes to others,  
which Universal Parenthood requires.  
Could all of those who claim descent from him  
cease to dispute his heritage, and meet him  
instead, like Melchizedek, with their gifts  
of bread and wine, this would at last be faithful  
service to the Encompassing, the Most High. 900

The mark of circumcision on the flesh  
is one sign given to Israel alone;  
the other is the Sabbath, which no stranger  
may keep as Israel keeps it.

Yet the Sabbath  
was made before the parting of the ways  
that singled Israel among the nations,  
as the very keystone of Creation's arch,  
that seventh day on which the world's Creator  
rested from work and hallowed a hiatus  
in the momentum of the cosmic process, 910  
which over centuries has kept alive  
many a social hope that now is drooping  
because the fourth commandment is repealed.  
For it was through this periodic strike  
and stepping off the moving road of time  
to a space hallowed to hold us in encounter,  
that we were granted visions of a world  
ruled by mercy and by justice rather  
than simple might; that we were given power  
to know ourselves as souls that meet in God. 920  
To keep the Sabbath is to bend Time's arrow



into a circle; and the structure seems  
 implicit in the structure of the world:  
 six coins exactly fit around a seventh!  
 Even so, it has been said, the seventh day  
 is not the end but center of the week,  
 the empty space though which (the Tao supplies  
 a kindred metaphor) the clay of time  
 becomes a vessel fit for human use.  
 And surely no coincidence has laid 930  
 on those to whom the Sabbath day was given  
 that most endangered star, the hexagram –  
 two interlocking triangles that also  
 can also be interpreted as symbolizing  
 the Sabbath by the central hexagon,  
 surrounded by the six days of the week  
 (the areas of six and one are equal,  
 as though to say the Sabbath peace might yet  
 balance the fragmentation born of struggle).  
 So that the Sabbath here appears supported 940  
 not by authoritative text alone  
 but by the chiming of the evidence  
 – Euclidean, so to speak – of words and things.  
 Beyond all questions of the Whence and When  
 whose answers may be dug for in the archives  
 of Earth, the inner eye that seeks the Whole  
 finds intimations of some destined shape  
 that grows through time toward clarity. The hymn  
 that welcomes in the Sabbath was not sung  
 until a master of the Kabbala 950  
 composed it some few centuries ago,  
 yet sounds in every thought of Sabbath now –  
 woe to the world, if it should ever cease!  
 For surely from that weekly song, if words  
 and thoughts have power, as it seems they do,  
 a wave of hope flows forth into the world  
 and pushes back against the raging billows  
 of forces that imperil the Creation,  
 would turn the world back to a swirling sea  
 of malice deaf to mercy as to judgment. 960  
 Alas for all that passions schism-born  
 have rent the Sabbath's clock in three, and given  
 pretext to those who would break down its wall  
 as obstacle to profitable license

which is but slavery to time's ill ends.  
 The voice that spoke to Noah when the flood  
 which human wrongs had raised, had sunk again,  
 spoke not of Sabbath, which the Torah fences  
 as the preserve of Israel alone;  
 yet it is said the peoples of the world 970  
 may keep it with a difference, with some change  
 which would in Israel be a violation.  
 And Paul Celan, who after that deluge  
 of wickedness that swept the Jews from Europe  
 and weakened the foundations of the world  
 stood forth alone, trying to breathe life back  
 into the world, pronounced as his last word  
 "Sabbath," envisioning a space where those  
 who bear in mind the destiny of earth  
 (be this one reading of those riddling lines) 980  
 and who have deeply read its deep-layered record,  
 could meet in mutual recognition, open  
 to the messages which from the deepest heart  
 and mind of each, which is the heart and mind  
 of all, arrive and mount up to a common  
 truth, which shall guide their joint and several hands  
 in tasks their destiny assigns to each.  
 And those so met shall surely lay to heart  
 those Sayings of the Fathers (often studied  
 by Israel on Sabbath afternoons) 990  
 that seem like algorithms set to fashion  
 a vessel of communicating minds  
 (that thing most needful now, when human knowledge  
 has grown beyond the compass of one mind),  
 maxims that school the mind in deliberation,  
 in scrupulous attention to the other,  
 in vigilance against the will to differ  
 which is not truth's true freedom but the bar  
 against its manifestation in our midst.  
 The solemn chant that brings the Sabbath in 1000  
 calls it a memory of the departure  
 from Egypt, kingdom of Determinism;  
 and in this light we read, too, the account  
 of how the Red Sea split to let them through  
 and how above the Sundered waves the vision  
 of God appeared so clear that it was seen  
 even by the unborn through the mother's womb—

the structures of causality thus made  
transparent to the Will that had designed them  
and could revoke; this chanted every day 1010  
may armor us against foregone conclusions.

And not alone the cycle of the week  
begins and closes with the Sabbath day;  
the seventh year is made a year of rest  
for the tilled land, and limit of all debts;  
and after seven seven-years the year  
of Jubilee enjoins a further rest  
and turns lands back to their ancestral owners.

Law of all laws most difficult to follow 1020  
(and since the land's full sovereignty was lost  
the years till Jubilee not even counted)  
yet standing still, as form above the chaos  
of economic warfare, for the thought  
that the momentum of the wheel of Fortune  
which ever throws to riches greater wealth  
and to the poor a deeper dispossession  
shall yet be checked, reversed, and each return  
to an estate apportioned by the lot  
of Heaven, not by mechanism of greed.

And meanwhile, we must gratefully recall 1030  
the various laws that give the poor a portion—  
the forgotten sheaf, the corner of the field,  
the tithe, the prohibition of retaining  
the workman's wage, or taking that in pawn  
by which the poor man lives, and all the various  
entreaties that commend Philanthropy  
and seek to clear the eye of any veil  
that in the poorer other hides the brother,  
the Image of the maker which all share.

For next to marriage let Philanthropy 1040  
be praised, in which the people Israel  
excel and which, wherever its sole is set,  
has made the desert blossom with the flowers  
of generosity and gratitude.

Surely this impulse more than any other  
proceeds from oneness with the Generous One  
Who breathed Creation forth into the void.  
The great Maimonides, who for the Law  
built the great palace of his Fourteen Books,

distinguished eight degrees of charity, 1050  
according as the giver gladly gives  
and honors the receiver; and the highest  
is to find work by which the poor can thrive  
so as not to be dependent upon gifts.  
Perhaps we may yet glimpse a ninth degree:  
to foster the devising of a system  
that may provide for all, accept the gifts  
of all, that none be useless or deprived.

And one more thing now asks to be remembered:  
Sacrifice! Of all peoples that have lived 1060  
and shaped their forms of life, that then decayed  
while others sprouted from their mould, how few  
failed to reserve, out of their choicest goods,  
gifts for such powers as they recognized  
beyond the bounded circle of their days!  
Of Israel's laws the half concern such gifts,  
disused now, since the sanctuary fell,  
yet studied still, and hoped to be restored,  
and their deep meaning meanwhile probed, refined.  
It is not that the Owner of the earth 1070  
craves such corporeal food, but that the mortal  
has need of giving, and has need to see  
the beast within him slain and elevated  
in service to the Highest. If now we blame  
such rites, how do we suffer in our midst  
the factories of meat, profane and cruel,  
and silently accept the human victims  
which the dark impulse in the heart of man,  
unpurified, unchastened, still exacts  
by way of entertainment? Were the Temple 1080  
rebuilt, the daily offering reinstated  
with song and prayer, who knows but that the rage  
of senseless human sacrifice would dwindle?  
Though Time has seemed to leave this dream behind,  
yet we might turn back toward it, as again  
we look toward Zion as the source of good,  
envisioning the Temple redescended  
from where it is stored up beyond disaster.  
This is a thing that may come clear in time,  
if time now takes the direction that we hope. 1090  
Among the sages some today envision

the former rites of sacrifice transformed  
in the new light they pray to shine on Zion,  
and from the present world that thought returns  
an echo: might today our offerings  
not be from that by which we chiefly live?  
Above all it is knowledge that men trade  
and turn to several profit. Might that new  
light not show some offering of knowledge,  
of intellectual effort dedicated 1100  
to the promotion of the common good?

All these the friends of Earth now lay to heart  
seeking in them a pattern for some action  
that may be true to Israel and Earth,  
and joined to Israel's prayer to the Most High  
Whose oneness as the Source of all that strives  
to make Creation whole, they do acknowledge  
and concentrate their wills in the petition  
to the Maker and Preserver of the world  
and Israel, Renewer, Reawakener, 1110  
Giver of understanding, from Whom issues  
the summons to return, the promise, too,  
that what is done can be repaired; Deliverer  
and Healer, Gatherer of Israel,  
Re-founder of just government, Rebuker  
of perverse ways, Preserver of the just,  
Sender of those who will rebuild His seat  
and be the channel for redeeming force  
into a world whose prayers meanwhile He hears,  
and most of all that prayer for the return 1120  
of Temple offerings joining Heaven and Earth,  
and Whom they thank for all the help that brought us  
to where we stand, and Who will give us peace,  
the peace that comes from following the laws  
of life. So may our longings, poured into  
this vessel with the prayers of Israel  
strengthen both to increasingly prevail!

Against the background of that prayer approaches  
once again the figure of the Mother,  
which we have seen projected on the background 1130  
of the Creation as its central symbol  
and summary, the unitary shape

that is the earthly mirror of the Oneness  
 of the One who breathed Being to the void –  
 may we now speak of Her without importing  
 contention with the image of the Father  
 that stands between Her and the Source of all,  
 as in our childhoods loomed that further figure  
 beyond the circle of the mother’s care,  
 that rod and staff, that leader and provider, 1140  
 whose firmness made the mother’s circle just,  
 so that it is no accident that here,  
 within the shadow of the fathers’ faith,  
 the Mother takes her most instructive shape.  
 We saw her flickeringly appear amid  
 the motley dreams of humankind, but most  
 distinctly, and most wedded to the thought  
 of covenant, as Malkhut, Congregation  
 of Israel, called also the Shekhinah,  
 who with her children treads the path of exile, 1150  
 divided from her Father and Beloved,  
 subject through history to external powers  
 that veil the Maker’s countenance from her sight.  
 She it is surely who unnamed appears,  
 to eyes that grow accustomed to the shadows,  
 behind the riddling lines of Paul Celan,  
 although divided from herself, or merged  
 with shapes that rise out of the alien ground.  
 She now, as from the Earth’s periphery  
 yet from within this people’s heart, approaches 1160  
 to ask if she may enter without bringing  
 contention with the image of the Father  
 through which so many centuries of humans  
 directed prayer to the One Source of all,  
 while in the counsels of the wise her daughters’  
 voice was hushed, and the Law assigned to woman  
 a place subordinate and circumscribed.  
 Yet in that Law’s domain there could arise  
 prophetesses, to whom God spoke directly  
 as to the prophets; and when prophecy 1170  
 had fallen silent, still the wise acknowledged  
 an extra understanding in the woman,  
 having affinities with the principle  
 of structure in the universe, the Judgment  
 with which the Earth’s conditions were laid down

(Freud's intuition, distant from the Source  
 and yet perhaps at times informed by it,  
 saw in woman the *Wirklichkeitsprinzip*).  
 That understanding worked in hidden ways  
 to make the fabric of Community, 1180  
 and once a week was sung, when in the shine  
 of the Sabbath lights the master of the house  
 praised the Woman of Valor. And beneath  
 the daylight paths of rational reflection,  
 halakhic question and determination,  
 there flowed a stream of intuition, fed  
 no doubt from cisterns that communicate  
 with the subterranean waters of all souls,  
 but by the straits that press on Israel  
 channeled into a course that is the course 1190  
 constructive Will must take to reach the world.  
 The Kabbalists saw from the crown of Will  
 emerge the father-point which they called Wisdom  
 in which all is implicit; thence unfolds  
 in Understanding, the Supernal Mother,  
 the world's design, which then through various stages  
 descends to reach that lowest emanation,  
 called Kingdom, Daughter, Lower Mother, most  
 distanced and in this nether world exposed  
 to warring unclean forces, yet at last 1200  
 destined to be repaired and reconciled  
 even to the highest Will, as its fulfillment.  
 Could but the circle of disdain that cinches  
 the destiny of Israel, be dissolved,  
 might She emerge from muteness and concealment  
 to be the housewife of an earth made home  
 to the just man's desire, and Heaven's delight?  
 We can but pray, and hope, and try to see  
 the shape of such a future; but by seeing  
 we give the possibility some space 1210  
 at least in mind; and we have leave to hope  
 that thus we pave its way into the world.

Enormous seem the obstacles that rise  
 upon the path our insight now projects:  
 can we indeed upon the stone rejected  
 by almost all Earth's peoples, build Earth's house?  
 For if indeed the friends of Earth resolve

to place their faith in Israel's destiny –  
by what means, by what channels could they now  
convey this message to the throngs of the Earth, 1220  
stunned as they are by media designed  
to stun them, to stop up the inner ear  
that hears the pleas of conscience, and to fracture  
the mind to be incapable of forming  
and following a trail of argument  
however short? and surely not a long one,  
leading to what perhaps they never wished  
to see. And all the more, since Israel's foes  
have with the channels of the news, the seats  
of learning, and the churches, purchased influence 1230  
with lucre, with the attraction that attaches  
always to arguments backed up by threats  
(safer to think the menaced in the wrong),  
seconded by the subterranean mutter  
of ancient prejudice too briefly banished?  
Yet in this cause the task of paving roads  
for the messengers of Earth is implicated,  
and to espouse this cause is a beginning  
and a continuance. Still from the dire  
straits that forever seek to close again 1240  
upon the soul, the voice of Psalms aspires  
toward that expanse in which the whole is viewed,  
from which help comes, whether in form of counsel,  
or in such overturnings of the odds  
as we have seen can be. If now Earth's friends  
could join their prayer to that of Israel,  
might the great darkness dissipate at last?



## Chapter 13

*Invocation of the maternal archetype as an aspect of the Divine. Formation of an association based on awareness of this archetype. Spiritual discipline needed to sustain the vision. Form of meetings of such association; its structure. Role of the poet. Vision of the Hexagon as meeting place.*

If we may hope that in this quest for hope  
we have attained from the One who breathed the world  
and still inspires it with creative life  
a benison to which His confidants,  
the people Israel, may yet say Amen  
if so the friends of Earth by deeds deserve,  
then with this hoped permission let us ask  
what it requires of us, this global Form,  
this great Imago which the mind projects  
from early childhood on the cosmic screen — 10  
we now believe the Author also casts it  
from His supernal Will onto this plane  
so that that the vision of the creature made  
in the Creator's image may both mirror  
and meet the deep design of the Creator.  
Can our surmise hope to approximate  
that deep design, seeing we ponder here  
over a concept which we have but gathered  
from scattered foundling-pebbles which the stream  
of intellectual exchange has washed 20  
into the world from Kabbala's massif?  
We can but handle them the way a child  
picks up a tool, though ignorant of its use.  
But if not vain imagining that voice  
which called us to this labor, we must needs  
hold faith that what has come to hand, to be  
by Earthlight now perused, was for this use  
permitted by that Providence of encounters  
which from the dawn of time has often steered  
the poet's dinghy through uncharted seas. 30

But at this new threshold of exposition  
a further qualm arises to impede  
my step. For till this moment we have moved  
among the monuments of former time,

the towers of the present dispensation,  
and had but to point out existing structures,  
noting and analyzing, while the real  
could chime corroboration. But from here  
onward, the path leads out into a future  
we have not to describe nor to predict 40  
but to create, laying the paving-stones  
before us as we walk out on the abyss  
of Possibility. Here what is shown  
will not be real, but to-be-realized:  
shall it seem plausible? or shall it seem  
a mere Utopian fantasy, no answer  
to perils that too solidly impend,  
or can it come as friend to faith that waits  
for sign more certain than such screed can give?  
Utopia! Thou star of human making 50  
which we from time to time have tried to thrust  
beyond the gravity of earth, in hopes  
of setting up a mark to guide our ships  
of state toward halcyon anchorage! Again,  
again you plunged to earth and cracked in pieces,  
showing the rubble of which you were made,  
and there were sometimes people underneath.  
Yet the constructive urge that lives in us,  
that senses and half-dares to deem itself  
an after-pulse of that which willed Creation, 60  
still works upon us to thrust out such worlds,  
with bated hope that one at last will fly,  
lest humankind grow savage in the dark  
that veils the higher counsel from our sight.  
Then let me build this model, let me show  
if only an imaginary world,  
inhabited by human self likewise  
imaginary, to be entered into  
in the spirit of romance, suspending, for  
the time of contemplation, disbelief, 70  
upon the hazard that those higher Spheres  
whose names if not in vain I here invoke  
will with some luminosity infuse  
the artificial star, that it find favor  
and influence the acting of some play.

The Lower Mother, then, bears several names.

She is called the Shekhinah, Divine Presence  
 in the Creation; She is called Congregation  
 of Israel, the wholeness of that people –  
 the World-soul we have seen as Her penumbra; 80  
 as Malkhut She is governance, once shown  
 in David’s kingdom; and this lowest Sphere  
 is also speech, in which thought manifests,  
 and finally the world of things that seem  
 lifeless, though it is said that even here  
 sparks of Divine awareness dwell disguised.  
 And closer to the source, the Higher Mother  
 is Understanding, is the hidden structure  
 of the Creation, and is also called  
 Return, for in approaching her the mind 90  
 entangled in the chaotic world divests  
 itself of partial interest and ascends  
 to find itself again in the great matrix  
 of Divine thought, where each thing has its place.  
 This aspect let us first invoke, intending  
 that with Her presence in each mind, the minds  
 may come more readily to that concord  
 that’s requisite to action – that our thoughts  
 may bend into the center of concern  
 and outward thence to its circumference. 100  
 Thus with Your leave, Projector of the world,  
 if by Your Providence we were set down  
 upon this shore of thought, may we so speak:  
 “Soul of this world, and our collective soul,  
 Who in her exile prays to hear from us –  
 Mother-mind by the highest hand inscribed  
 in the circle of the Earth, life of our lives,  
 Indwelling Presence of Transcendent Power  
 Whom none can honor without honoring Thee,  
 who still above the wreck of time appears 110  
 to call us home to the world that love would make;  
 Thou art Understanding, that combines  
 things most diverse into a single being;  
 From Thee springs Judgment, that acknowledges  
 what will not fit, and makes the sacrifice.  
 House of good proportion where Compassion  
 that teaches us to spare the frail beginnings  
 of higher things, shall dwell forevermore,  
 unwithered by the cold of mutual fear:

in all things from which helpfulness and beauty                   120  
 and honor shine, Thou takest Thy delight.  
 Thou, hearing in our hearts, open our ears  
 to the complaint of all that suffer wrong;  
 Thou, seeing in our hearts, open our eyes  
 to every gift pursuit of power would trample  
 or hide from sight beneath a market-price;  
 and turn by deepest sense the hearts of all  
 that love Thee toward each other; be our common  
 sense to order all Thy household goods  
 thriftily, that each one may receive                                   130  
 needful reward for good work done in gladness,  
 nor ever fail the storehouse of our Earth.  
 Send us and all who call on Thee in truth  
 dream and insight, oracle and song,  
 and by Thy strength of love brace us to bear  
 Thy vision through the darkness of our days,  
 patient as gradual waters that replace  
 dead matter with pure crystal, age by age,  
 till, by the Eternal Will that shows Thee now,  
 all human life be service to Thy oneness                           140  
 with, in, the One Who is the source of all.  
 May I in all ways honor Thee, my heart  
 be open to Thy every admonition,  
 by whatsoever messenger it come."  
 Now if the soul has couriers that wait  
 to take its messages by unseen roads,  
 Her likeness animated in us by  
 our words, may waken far-off correspondence;  
 and if petition for the opening  
 of sense, that we may recognize on meeting                       150  
 the comrades of our quest, answers itself,  
 then shall the solitary vigils join  
 to one companionship and space of counsel,  
 a glowing core of courage gather mass  
 to draw in other hearts from paths of doom.  
 Or as the wide unnavigable torrent  
 that rushes toward Niagara was bridged  
 by tossing to the farther shore a clew  
 of twine which, drawn upon, drew after it  
 a stronger cord, a rope and then a hawser,                       160  
 until the heavy cable moved across  
 from which the bridge was hung: so might we haul

on cords of prayer to bring in mutual speech,  
 on mutual speech to bring in comradeship,  
 till weightier deed and word of wider hearing  
 and mental power to waken Understanding  
 and stare down Force, may follow, till our kind  
 have crossed the monster-teeming gulf to dwell  
 in the long-darkened house from which the first  
 faint light is gleaming now. O Star of Hope, 170  
 eternal Star of Love and Understanding,  
 Ayelet haShachar! rise, shine, illumine  
 for us the steps that we must climb toward Thee!  
 For mounting up I see the thresholds high:  
 first, the recognition of Thine Image,  
 before which still the monsters of the threshold  
 may rear, that guard the avenues of Return;  
 next, inward constancy against the odds;  
 third, the recognition of the Other  
 to whom Thy vision also makes appeal. 180  
 O may that might of will by which the future  
 begets itself upon itself, commend  
 and show to our most generous desiring  
 our sibling in the eternal love, the more  
 favored with gifts of beauty and of truth,  
 the less beloved of our most natural heart,  
 by which bent will so many seek the praise  
 of the unenlightened, turning from the light  
 that shines from one another, and thereby  
 darkening themselves and all that turn to them. 190  
 Trial in which the first trial is repeated;  
 for whoso turns from Her light in another  
 turns from Herself, and all that had opposed  
 the pointing of Her vision on our sight  
 regroups against that other, whose approach  
 is heralded, then, by some dark alarm,  
 stinging of envy or Medusa's snakes,  
 against which may the Muse of courage gather  
 nocturnal herbs for a transmuting potion,  
 compose some spell to rock our rage to sleep 200  
 that we may dream the Others, and awaken  
 to hail them for the eternal friends they are!

The service of that Aspect, in whose hands  
 alone the earth might yet be held entire,

implies a certain science of the heart  
 beyond, between the interstices of Law,  
 though the Law's keeping is prerequisite  
 to its distinct exactitude— exact  
 no less than the laws that prod our dissolution  
 with number-spawned devices all the day — 210  
 that truth may have its rightful consequence  
 and word and act may build on one another.  
 Not that we can deny or disregard  
 what any science learns. All enters in  
 to an inquiry whose criterion  
 is the supernal Presence we invoke,  
 whose rationale (as inexhaustible,  
 as simple, as the Tao) is the awareness  
 of her gestalt, of her becoming real  
 among us, till, as those who love intuit 220  
 the feeling of the beloved on each point,  
 we sense with her, like the Princess on the Pea,  
 each slight misprision that, with usury  
 of error, might imperil all Her being.  
 Even by that sting one poet learned to use,  
 owning a poem good that caused him envy,  
 truth, in intaglio, reveals itself.  
 The Form and the dark impulse which assails it  
 both serve us, both alert us to the ones  
 whom we must see, the words which we must hear; 230  
 but most the Form calls out for that attention  
 which is, we heard, the soul's most natural prayer,  
 so we may be instructed and perceive  
 that in the common ground to which we come  
 each in our hour, the lines of a foundation  
 are traced, for us to make them visible  
 and bring to every place its rightful stone;  
 and for a written testament of Her  
 we have the record of Her apparitions  
 from Solomon and Sophocles till now 240  
 to set before our eyes, to place upon  
 one shelf, and take them down in doubtful hour  
 that our own vision may return to us  
 from the depth of time, and we may act and speak  
 in presence of the dead and the unborn  
 and round us feel the matrix of connection  
 that holds all destinies involved in one.

There is an art of tracing in that matrix  
 the roads that go from poem to poem and  
 from life to life, to lead them toward the same: 250  
 the art of dream-interpretation, known  
 to stone-eyed Freud, a mirror that may yet,  
 unmarred by seeking of the minor self,  
 show the true form of all we hold it to.  
 And then there are those speakings of our own  
 (for it is promised no one shall be mute)  
 that set a signal-flare, that take a bearing  
 on some point in the landscape of Her truth,  
 that make some contact with the Elephant  
 (the common substrate to all sight and feeling), 260  
 findings that cannot jar with one another  
 once we have set our heel on the envious impulse  
 that was the only foe to Understanding:  
 exactitude and generosity  
 become each other and indeed are one,  
 as love and rigor in the eternal Being.  
 When we have pulled down vanity, how high  
 the mountain which that hut concealed from view!  
 –Such are the thoughts in which the friends of Earth,  
 if prayer for Earth begins to take effect, 270  
 begin to school themselves, pondering each  
 alone within the circle of the lamplight  
 of their own reason and experience,  
 circle that knows itself as a projection  
 of Earth's circumference, light by which they read  
 on the open page, in their own palms, the paths  
 that lead them to the meeting place, as those  
 who take upon themselves the obligation  
 of Universal Parenthood, the task  
 of thinking for us all. From such roads come, 280  
 they in their convocations shall consider  
 the questions and the doings of the day  
 and give true counsel to our good intentions.

But now another trial, another threshold  
 looms up: it is the threshold of agreement  
 upon some form of action that could mirror  
 that Form, articulate and manifest  
 the comradeship of souls such Form betokens  
 and, beneath that, the sacredness of speech,

which with the Lower Mother is aligned: 290  
 speech, the one touchstone of our thoughts and acts,  
 the substance of our conscious common life.  
 thought's only currency and circulation  
 and medium of the overarching art;  
 fluid that holds both music and depiction,  
 gesture and number and the various knowledge  
 extracted by our toil, in one emulsion,  
 water of life – no primal plasma truly,  
 a compound of most varying admixture  
 that arbitrarily couples sound and sense; 300  
 a thing evolved, evolving to dispersion  
 through chance forgetfulness and willful change  
 by tribes and subtribes that like separate drops  
 draw themselves in, shrinking from common meaning;  
 a surface always crumbling into jargons  
 or processed by high-placed prevarication  
 to featurelessness like a napalmed face –  
 subject in fine to every human fate,  
 yet still the one material we have  
 to build the human house of Understanding, 310  
 the one arena where our consciousness  
 can wrestle with dispersion, bind it back  
 into the ever-kind configuration  
 that gives to each a name, a talisman  
 of worth, and to that name associations  
 of true companionship and destiny,  
 and does not leave us to the numbers' doom  
 but in the vision of unity affords  
 us shelter and allays our thirst with meanings  
 that bind us to the Mother-word. Then let 320  
 us honor language as Her garment, as  
 Her very self, hallowing every song  
 that bodies forth Her wholeness, and consenting  
 to be Her subjects for a weekly space,  
 a clearing in the thicket of our strife:  
 with this a habitable world begins.

It is no alien thought now, that in Form  
 resides the only Power we might pit  
 against the rot of ill-directed Time;  
 has, then, earth's present urgency of speech 330  
 some form that it could offer to the speakers?



There is a dread that often overshadows  
the recognition of necessity  
for the acceptance of a common rule—  
commitment that must be distinguished from  
that deference to external threat and power  
with which it must conflict, with which it is  
confused, but from which it alone preserves us,  
giving identity consistency,  
binding identities into one being. 340

On Form all solidarity is founded,  
and upon solidarity, all freedom.  
Known it is that the rules of chess are fixed,  
invariant; in none of all the games  
that have been played or could be played, might any  
rook move slantwise; yet from these restrictions  
an infinite variety arises.  
So it is here, once thought and prayer have vanquished  
the shadow of a fear for something called  
freedom, though empty and inconsequent. 350

From underneath the fast-shut door of this  
anxiety, may light of wonder seep  
to tell us of a world of wide perception  
where all regret dissolves into the sense  
of the power to make over which, once freed  
by the minds' fusion, shall subdue the might  
let loose upon the Earth when the atom split.

The convocations, then, of those who hope  
to body Wisdom forth, call for some rule  
of order, that will let us hear each other. 360

O may we learn the lesson of too many  
meetings convened for purposes of moment  
that, without ever an inner truth appearing,  
wore themselves down through clash and contradiction  
to a mere frittering of word and time!  
As love, so speech of destiny requires  
order and ceremony; counsel has  
its form, as well as song. For how can rede  
emerge from babbling voices that contend  
for right of speech, and scarcely hear themselves, 370  
far less their fellows; that, as filings flock  
to one pole or the other of a magnet,  
are quick to bay the two ends of a question,

in between which the truth lies unattractive  
or trampled like the ground of a sham-battle?  
Save by the grace of Form, that is consent  
of each to be included in a structure,  
the One Mind will not come to us, but all  
hang separately, although by one decree.  
Not without memory's assistance here 380  
we innovate, for widely-scattered peoples  
have learned to pass the privilege of speech  
around the circle (form as if ordained  
by Earth's informing power around the globe).

So, then, the light of hope and memory shows us  
a room, in it a ring of chairs, no more  
than ten or twelve. Upon the appointed hour  
they enter, take their places silently  
until the ring is full. Then let the one  
who entered last, invoke the helping power 390  
in words like these: We gather here to see  
faces from which we need not hide our face,  
to hear the sound of honest speech, to share  
what dreams have etched upon the sleeping brain,  
what the still voice has said, when heavy hours  
plunged us to regions of the mind and life  
not mentioned in the marketplace: to find  
and match the threads of common destinies,  
designs grimed over by our thoughtless life –  
A sanctuary for the common mind 400  
we seek. Not to compete, but to compare  
what we have seen and learned, and to look back  
from here upon that world where tangled minds  
create the problems they attempt to solve  
by doubting one another, doubting love,  
the wise imagination, and the word.  
For, looking back from here upon that world,  
perhaps ways will appear to us, which when  
we only struggled in it, did not take  
counsel of kindred minds, lay undiscovered; 410  
perhaps, reflecting on the Babeled speech  
of various disciplines that make careers,  
we shall find out some speech by which to address  
each sector of the world's fragmented truth  
and bring news of the whole to every part.

We say the mind, once whole, can mend the world.  
To mend the mind, that is the task we set.  
How many years? How many lives? We do not know;  
but each shall bring a thread.

The next around  
the circle (counterclockwise: a direction 420  
long thought ill-omened, but here symbolizing  
a counter-movement to the uncorrected  
course of events) might speak a second prayer,  
in words like these: "Spirit of Understanding,  
Mother of all, in Your name we are gathered  
to know our mind and Yours. Help us to trust  
Your strength that grows among us, and thereby  
to trust in one another, that the truth  
deep known to each within may surface here  
and shed its light on every situation, 430  
all knowledge we may bring from distant fields.  
Loosen, for this one hour of our encounter,  
the bonds of wariness, that freeze the mind  
from looking at itself; let dream and vision,  
proverb and song and those swift recognitions  
that run ahead of sight, come to thought's aid  
and not be turned away; may we attend  
through one another's voice to the low voice  
of our own heart and Yours, till we forget  
who speaks, and only hear the common thought 440  
and see with single eye the single globe.  
Attune our counsel to the thought of those  
who elsewhere gather in Your name this night,  
for future's sake; and manifest Yourself  
to us now in the joy of fitting speech  
and awe of Being by Your grace unveiled."  
"Be it so," all say. The speaker turns a glass  
that runs five minutes, hands it to the next  
around the circle, who now has to speak –  
or else be silent – till the glass is run. 450  
Relaxed, all watch the running of the sand  
and hear the voice that speaks, for those five minutes,  
not interrupting; for they understand  
that thoughts in the awareness of their limit  
will pack themselves to crystal density,  
as in the compass of poetic form  
a vasty recognition curls at rest.

The sands are run, the glass is turned and given  
 on to the right, and so till it has come  
 full circle twice or thrice. As from the centers 460  
 of one brain meditating on the world,  
 so from the points of listening's compass rose  
 thought answers thought and image comes toward image  
 as That which has to build itself of us  
 takes thought, that it may live. And when the last  
 has spoken thus, the one next to that one  
 offers a valediction, in this strain:  
 "Spirit of Understanding, that has guided  
 our speech while we entrusted, as to You,  
 our being's deepest thoughts to one another, 470  
 we go now from this place, into a world  
 not yet informed by Understanding's law,  
 and for six days must trace within this world  
 our separate paths. When they shall cross, then give us  
 strength to be true to what we here have said,  
 and lend each other aid for Your world's sake.  
 With Your discernment let us look on all  
 that we may see, and with Your patience wait  
 for the word's right occasions, for the faces  
 of those we may address to come in view; 480  
 and with Your force-field of protection cover  
 the paths by which we move to the next hour  
 when we shall gather and behold Your vision,  
 the pledge of Earth entire and freed from strife."  
 This said, they with courageous looks take leave  
 of one another, and depart in silence,  
 lest any idle word should mar the rite  
 and crack the flask wherein our mutual speech  
 listening to itself refines itself  
 and counsel from the speech of all emerges. 490

When, in the hurrying flux of time, is space  
 for such a meeting? "Sabbath," said the voice;  
 but to that voice a dubious echo sounds  
 from the continuous days and weeks through which  
 are driven crowds that scarcely can remember  
 the name of Sabbath, far less what it meant.  
 Stern Liberty, that lifts the guiding torch  
 above the pitiless map of our compulsions,  
 what tears of bronze you weep to see us rushed

through endless weeks that grant no space for breath! 500  
 But if we can no longer, or not yet  
 keep the Sabbath, we at least can hold it  
 as the first theorem and the talisman  
 of a world resolved in a well-tempered order —  
 we can remember and anticipate,  
 project the circle of a Sabbath kept  
 as the Mother would direct us in this time.  
 Nor should the attention we are bade to bend  
 on Time's appearances, omit to grasp  
 that even this time, that for a time, for many, 510  
 has locked the sanctuary of the Sabbath,  
 has opened up a space-and-time beyond  
 divisions of the map, the calendar —  
 a metaphor of the world's inner space,  
 though travestied by uses most profane.  
 Might those in whom the memory of Sabbath  
 still lives, not enter into that new-opened  
 No-Land, No-Time (O with what fearful wonder,  
 Celan, you would have warmed this new-found house!)  
 with sacred purpose, and in sacred manner 520  
 find out the forms that here would be projected  
 by the aura of the Mother's need and nature?  
 Let us suppose a Homepage, to which all  
 that see the Mother's vision could report.  
 The site would sort them into tens (in order  
 of their appearance on the site, at first,  
 though other sortings then could be devised  
 — there's room here for experimental play).  
 To a protected site each ten would send  
 messages which they alone could read, 530  
 their contributions showing as a single  
 continuous text, each writer posting once  
 and waiting till all others had been heard from  
 before posting again. A further rule  
 might set the length of messages (at least  
 thirty lines, say, and no more than one hundred)  
 or specify that every contribution  
 must be in verse, if only of the kind  
 that seems but interrupted prose — even such  
 can focus our attention on the words, 540  
 so leave our thought the freer to unfold.  
 Each person, at the practicable hour,

sits down before the screen, lights, let us say,  
a candle, summons up the current thread  
(which always would begin with some such prayers  
as are above inserted). Reads these prayers  
aloud, reads anything that follows them  
subvocally, and writes what comes to mind.  
After two rounds of this, the thread of meeting  
would be tied off, with closing prayer appended, 550  
and posted on that forum as a message  
to be reviewed by all of its composers,  
and a new thread would start. In some such manner  
participants could make their separate times  
for meditation and reflection, yet  
their words would in a common form be bound.

Nor would the process of our taking-form  
end with convening of the group of ten,  
but when within our ken are two such circles,  
then every group would delegate one member 560  
to meet with others likewise delegated  
until this circle, also, rounds to ten.  
And as the compass of the circles grows,  
new tiers are added. So we might proceed  
(adapting, thus, the counsel Jethro offered  
to Moses at the foot of Sinai's slope)  
to organize, build up an organism,  
sentient in all its parts, of living minds,  
envisioning a tenth and ultimate night  
when in one space from all parts of the globe 570  
the inmost counsel of the earth shall meet  
to speak the song whose images and tropes  
have traveled like a wave from the circumference  
and will as clarifying echo spread  
in widening circles to the outer rim.

But I have overstepped the question how  
each circle ought to choose its delegate.  
How shall we bar from this deliberation  
intrigue and envy and the pull of force  
promising conquest; how shall pure discernment 580  
prevail over the thousand motivations  
of interest and evasion, which award  
the shepherd's crook most often to the wolves?

But yet the method of our meeting might  
 avail us, help us reach a depth where council's  
 voice can sound, unjammed, a height from which  
 the layout of our capabilities  
 might be surveyed by all. Let us suppose  
 a circle, for the fourth time reconvened,  
 who from the minds' acquaintance of three meetings 590  
 proceed to choose. The first to speak relates  
 such knowledge of each present mind as hearing  
 has given, as though all, the speaker too,  
 were characters in some long-since-recorded  
 chronology, as though what now is heard  
 were the voiced thoughts of some reflecting reader  
 to whose far-distant eye the signs that mark  
 the rightful one stand out in letters clear:  
 the one who has most truly, deeply spoken,  
 who has the largest portion in the word, 600  
 who with attentive meditation gathers  
 the experience of all into their own  
 to frame each time one message, which the rest  
 acknowledge; in whose vision others see  
 themselves reflected as they know themselves.  
 So one by one they offer their perceptions  
 of the small world they constitute, and of  
 its best coordinator, who appears  
 not so much chosen as revealed. When all  
 have spoken thus, five minutes, then the hand 610  
 of speech sweeps quickly while each names one name,  
 and it will be the same, the Mother aiding;  
 but if they differ, then the one with largest  
 following is chosen till ten more  
 meetings have revolved, when the next favored  
 is given authority for half the space,  
 and after those five meetings they again  
 choose by the same procedure as before.  
 This is the first and greatest common task:  
 to recognize the one gift that confers 620  
 on all gifts their appropriate arrangement  
 and fittest uses; and when this is done,  
 all have the accomplishment. The one so chosen  
 they call the Gatherer, and to that office  
 grant powers circumscribed, as in the game  
 of chess one piece may move more than the others:

to be the first and last to speak each time  
after the opening prayer, before the close,  
to sound an opening theme and final chord;  
to change at will the first round of a meeting 630  
for an hour's exposition by a speaker  
who craves a longer hearing for the labor  
of one mind on some theme that touches all,  
which they in usual form then meditate;  
to call a vote, should circumstance require it,  
although such closures of deliberation  
that break the circle to a wedge of action  
and weigh truth on the numbers' scale, are not  
the aim to which all tends. Rather to see  
and see ever more deeply and in common 640  
and in the common vision-space to gather  
the worlds they move in: passing in review,  
bringing to focus in the common vision  
the causes to which they might speak, the others  
whom they might summon; learning each from each  
perspective, strength and skill; making connections.  
Nor is the hierarchy of the circles  
a hierarchy of subordination.  
As in the hierarchy of the nerves  
that gather and sum up incoming signals, 650  
and then diffuse the signals of response,  
the levels here are mutually informed;  
nor are these ranks marked off by ostentation.  
Perhaps when two, or three, tiers have convened  
those hundred or those thousand might collect  
enough to keep one Gatherer amongst them  
free to pursue those studies and encounters  
that tend toward the formation of Earth's mind  
and make the Mother present in the world—  
so little substance needs the word to thrive! 660  
Out of those so maintained, the further levels  
of Gatherers would arise. With added work  
each higher tier would ask the Gatherers  
of the next lower tier to render aid.  
At every level they would keep an archive  
containing what the files below contain:  
all records which the members wish to leave  
for their contemporaries to consult,  
for coming generations to recall;



and it would be the Gatherer's task to read, 670  
 to learn from all, and order what they bring  
 with catalog, response and commentary,  
 so as to make it most accessible  
 and apprehensible in the relations  
 among the offerings of various minds,  
 creating, thus, an intellectual room  
 where the wisdom needed for community,  
 secure from mere invidious innovation,  
 may welcome fresh discovery, receive  
 beneficent invention with delight, 680  
 unfold its consequential panoply  
 of implication, open up its springs  
 of inspiration for resourcefulness;  
 a room that shall ever more presently  
 surround each circle meeting in the shadow  
 and light of Earth. And in that room of meeting  
 shall not our deepest mind begin to see  
 the light of common dream, that vanquishes  
 the power of separation, death itself  
 growing transparent to our sight, till even 690  
 arrogance shall fade to awe and merge  
 in ever-growing Power-to-make-over?

If through the Mother's presence in our thought  
 these circles can configurate and shed  
 light on our undertakings, then may bardcraft,  
 that mystery of which the word is both  
 material and implement, be seen  
 in its true shape, assume its rightful place  
 among the undertakings of our kind.  
 Wake, bard! The night of Newton's sleep is past, 700  
 in which the word, the only apparatus  
 of the poet's research and investigation,  
 deferred to speechless numbers, as the too  
 too solid bulk of those material feats  
 made poetry appear a dream hard science  
 should rouse us from. Now the awareness dawns  
 of earth imperiled by default of mind,  
 of mind endangered as our acts impinge  
 on the distracted globe of consciousness  
 with stimuli that sabotage reflection, 710  
 shredding the cloak of human thought, of human

dignity, which we must now reseat,  
having no thread and needle but the word –  
we needs must call upon that ancient trade  
of making-whole, its purpose long-obscured  
till it appeared a solitary craft,  
so often likened to a little boat  
tossed on the world-sea, far from common shore.

Not simple is the task. For though this craft  
inhere in us through deep inheritance, 720  
come to the human from beyond the human,  
from the very pulse toward Form that is creation,  
the incrustations that obscure its nature  
are old as history. Nor can we claim  
that this vocation in its natural habit,  
or any of the styles thereof, is suited  
to the configuration of this hour.

Rather its true shape is yet to be made  
by us, in light of the great Shape we've seen.

We traced its roots down to the deepest taproot 730  
of language – to the very act of naming,  
which in the flux of particles to which  
all being may be reduced, if so one will,  
draws a firm line, confirms the identity  
of shape and thing, and makes them usable  
for human purposes. The poet, making  
out of these shapes of sound and sign a greater  
shape, to denominate a situation,  
furthers the work of meaning which began  
with the first name; and now we see that work 740  
of meaning leading toward some great completion  
in which the state of Man shall be made whole  
as the Creator's Name is unified.

But on the way, we see that work involved  
with many purposes: to keep the laws  
and annals of the tribe, unite the wills  
in ritual and warfare, to call good  
that which the leaders of the tribe decree,  
to assist the body in self-healing through  
integrative suggestion, soothing rhythm – 750  
in much of which the poet was the servant  
of the community, the Muse's child,  
one with the flowering life-tree of the people,

the delegate of magnanimity  
 in the councils of the individual heart,  
 – though creatural self-interest of the host  
 in whose brain the expensive golden bird  
 had built its nest, need also have its voice  
 in the composition of the poet's calling.

We saw the start of poesy in mirrored 760  
 delight of child and mother with the child's  
 growing into the becoming shape  
 of speaking humanness; but rivalry  
 with father and with sibling overshadow  
 that primal sphere. And if at adolescence  
 the blossom from the childhood root appears  
 in the display of mating – where the mind's  
 superfluous splendors mushroomed, like the fan  
 the peacock spreads, the bower-bird's construction,

as some believe – then here is further ground 770  
 for rivalry that vies with common vision  
 in composition of poetic mind.  
 Here, too, the principles of love and strife  
 seem to oppose and further one another,  
 as self-display calls forth receptive mind  
 capable, also, of responding song,  
 enlarges the maternity of mind  
 to see and shape another's faculty –  
 the poet and the mother of the poet  
 seem to follow each other into being. 780  
 And as the wellspring of poetic voice  
 is fed by several sources, various too  
 are the relations that unite or distance  
 the poet to or from the group. When humans  
 lived with the earth on simple terms, the gift  
 of poetry would oftentimes appear  
 spread almost evenly among the tribe,  
 degrees of its possession recognized  
 through mutual self-knowledge of the band.

Each had his song, his vision; each occasion 790  
 called forth its rhythmic comment and response,  
 and the more rich in vision helped the lesser  
 to catch their visionary moments; yet  
 perhaps on average one in a hundred,  
 as educated guesses have surmised,  
 was marked out by the Muse to bear her burden

and be proportionately borne by all.  
 As bands were joined to chiefdoms, as the social  
 gradations turned to hierarchic stairs,  
 the poet figured now as servant to 800  
 the powerful, maker of praise-songs, now  
 as the diviner of What-Is and voice  
 of the people, speaking truth to reckless power.  
 And here and there, as humans start to gather  
 in the first towns whose annals are unwritten,  
 a half-told tale reports configuration  
 of a collective poesy designed  
 to gather in communicating minds  
 the social body's intricate information:  
 the genealogies, the myths and tales, 810  
 the laws of family and property,  
 the lore of nature, mysteries of trades,  
 summed and stored up in vasty combs of verse  
 o'er which the prentice crawled for twenty years  
 till he or she became a judge, a priestess,  
 a ruler, even, of a city made  
 transparent to the inner eye of song —  
 The Druids' world, though alien to our own,  
 with different graces, different cruelties,  
 still feeds our song, ironically recalled 820  
 by Caesar's written record of the odd  
 matters which his troops, reliably  
 dispatched by written orders, made an end of.  
 Through memory external to the mind  
 the poets lost their jobs as memory's wardens  
 and were demoted to mere entertainers  
 dismissible at will — increasingly  
 dismissed, as ways were found to entertain,  
 and at the same time stun, the passive masses.  
 Not that disaster brought no gift. The act 830  
 of writing, of projecting on a surface  
 outside ourselves, the contents of the mind,  
 could, to the mind that still retained its center,  
 become an aid to introspection, as  
 a mirror can at times reveal to us  
 that which our inner thoughts might strive to hide;  
 and in the poem as a written object  
 through centuries the formal will has learned  
 to concentrate and to enrich itself,

as meanwhile in the polity the press 840  
 proclaimed what power wished, yet also served  
 the people learning and communicating  
 among themselves how best to guard their freedom.  
 But gradually on the whole the poet's  
 ground has shrunk, till those in whom the yen  
 to make a thing of words inheres so deeply  
 that no discouragement can root it out,  
 persist like castaways from some lost world,  
 superfluous to this world, unwelcome in it,  
 or like one roused from sleep by an alarm 850  
 inaudible to others' sleeping ears.  
 till they begin to lose the memory  
 of what they meant, and fail to recognize  
 each other on the pathways of this world  
 but rival with each other for the scraps  
 still flung to them by a forgetful culture;  
 and envy, in the absence of the READER—  
 of that receptive and delighting mind,  
 empty of singular ambition, tuned  
 to what can speak the human being's need— 860  
 strikes out the fellow-poet's deepest word  
 and writes the word of literary fashion.

But if the form of Understanding now  
 shines on us, giving focus to that will-  
 to-form, which is in us from old inherent,  
 then shall our craft repair and right itself.  
 Already, here, we have begun to read  
 a work that had been shaping since of old,  
 that great poem all poets have built up,  
 like the cooperating thoughts of one 870  
 great mind, since the beginning of the world,  
 Shelley had said, although that unity  
 for long was hidden from the workers strewn  
 through time and space of Earth and only half-  
 avowing their deep influence and relation.  
 As to our eyes the Whole begins to loom,  
 it seems a play performed on many stages  
 by actors who appear and disappear,  
 each catching just an echo of the other,  
 or like an epic in long relays told, 880  
 its theme the ever-and-again-repeated

descent of Orpheus to the darkest deep  
 of human mind and destiny, retrieving  
 traces of vision that become a trail  
 left by the wanderings of Understanding  
 from shape to shape, her showings ever again  
 obscured, from the first hinting half-inscription  
 to Paul Celan, who kept the mother-word  
 in the years when the land of song lay waste  
 and word was powerless to breed true act. 890  
 And one by one, summoned by bardic chant,  
 the other builders of the Earth shall rise,  
 all those whose thought was tangent to this whole.  
 All these a memory that would re-found  
 tradition, knits into a single council,  
 aided by other images returning:  
 the Table Round, the passing of the pipe,  
 the harp, in Indian or druid circle,  
 the miracle at Philadelphia  
 and that at Yavneh, where the rabbis wove 900  
 a fabric of community that stood  
 the strain of exile: all the real and fabled  
 precedents for a meeting of true minds.  
 Of all such traces, then, we build a canon  
 to which we may refer, which we may hope  
 to teach, someday, to all that show the gift.  
 To learn this story, learn these songs by heart,  
 to teach the plots, the symbols that recur  
 in dreams that ever and again betoken  
 Her presence and endangerment amid 910  
 the thickets of the heart and of the world,  
 is to devise or to reconstitute  
 a common language capable of naming  
 and of addressing in constructive ways  
 the multiple predicament of Earth;  
 and in that light we'll pray to recognize  
 each word of one another that deserves  
 inclusion in the storehouse of the Whole,  
 using the sting of envy as a signal  
 and guide to what we are required to hail; 920  
 studying, too, the writings that assist us  
 to rectify the heart's more twisted ways.  
 Surely, too, we shall frame a code of honor,  
 to counter the temptation bids us woo

with base appeal a most unworthy hearing.  
And so each poet, standing forth to speak,  
shall to the minds of hearers summon up  
the assembly of the makers of all times;  
and fear of our one Maker may inspire  
the hearers to not lightly disregard them. 930

Would this then be return of Prophecy?  
Not, surely as the ancient prophets knew it,  
who could invoke the high authority  
of the Eternal; yet a lunar shadow,  
perhaps, that from a sensing of this nether  
sphere, calls to the same sense in the hearer.

Suppose, then, that the circles we envision  
configure, and that the Guild of Bards  
can constitute itself (how these two structures  
would interweave their workings, we entrust 940  
to the future thought of those each way convened):  
these each would ask some space to bring and store  
their offerings, and meet when time allows.

Supernal Mother! I have seen a house  
whose ground-plan is a hexagon, recalling  
the Sabbath and the polity of bees  
(that ancient symbol of the poet's trade):  
the shape that reconciles contiguous circles,  
betokening a shadow cast on our  
plane from some higher sphere (the hexagon 950  
can also be the shadow of a cube;

Kepler called God a sphere, and man a circle).  
To think this shape in small or large dimensions,  
into the heart of every town and city,  
largest into that heart of hearts that is  
Jerusalem, perhaps hard by the place  
of ancient sacrifice; to show this vision  
to fellow-citizens, and to expound  
its need to be, the hopes that it would hold  
as meeting-place and archive – for the circles 960  
that meet in search of wisdom, for the poets  
as wisdom's workers in particular –,  
for scientists amid whose calculations  
the vision of the Whole shall come to stand –  
a place that is a listening ear, a mind

that meditates, a memory that holds,  
a voice that speaks for all that live around it,  
a solid pledge of Earth-mind and Earth-household.  
Here is employment for our eloquence,  
and for the other arts as well: for music 970  
tuned to such words, for color, line and contour  
to take the images our thought has called  
from off the inner retina and show them  
to outward sight. Great Shape we have discerned,  
and Source beyond all shape and form, assist us  
convene our aspirations in this wish!  
Then give us words to speak to every soul,  
to every interest that represents  
a single strand of our entangled care,  
till one day we be privileged to stand 980  
beneath the rafters of Your solid house!

Such are form's miracles we must intend  
and make for with an urgency of Now  
that taps Creation's far-sent power-surge;  
such is the vision which the friends of Earth  
shall hold, however few at first and scattered  
among those blind as yet to Her desire,  
frowned down on by Goliaths of the mind  
that dwarf the word with ingenuities  
and wisdom's thrift with ever costlier madness. 990  
But even at this hour, not too late  
if we can find the will to make the start,  
the word may prove sufficient to the wise.  
If by the grace of Him who breathed the world  
we have found out an archetypal thing,  
a form of action that could represent  
the shape of shapes which Black Elk once beheld,  
the binding of the volume shown to Dante,  
the way things hold together in the hold  
of Understanding, the Supernal Mother; 1000  
if these tiered circles, and the House that stands  
for the world's inwardness, could find beholders,  
could exercise attraction on the minds  
of more and many, these might presently  
configure a communications system  
relying upon truth from mind to mind  
that may yet send a message undistorted



around the world, in entropy's despite,  
anticipated in the hearing heart  
in circles wide as daylight and as starlight,  
and show the presence in the world of those  
resolved upon its healing, on the human  
arising from the struggles of becoming  
into our greater being and new life.

1010

## Chapter 14

*The outward paths: implications and steps toward realization in the fields of politics, law, economics, technology. The critical importance of a community of teachers.*

We have gazed into the future dark until  
a point of light appeared, into that point  
till it expanded into human, more-  
than-human form, which in its turn unfolded  
into an order of envisioned actions  
till upon steps appearing as we climbed  
we seemed to mount into another world,  
the real earth lost from sight, save for the beacon —  
which blackest storm- and smoke-clouds roil to obscure —  
of Zion's citadel. Let us return, 10  
then, to the scene from which we turned away,  
and ask ourselves if that envisioned world,  
the laboratory of our thought, indeed  
furnished us with solutions that will serve.  
The earth comes back in focus as that field  
where fears, each boasting itself worst, contend  
to shape the nightmares of inertia's stupor:  
the fear that all the granaries of war  
we store each year with deadlier bane, may burst 20  
and make of us a harvest without seed;  
the fear our greed, with widening sharpening jaws,  
may gnaw till it has girdled all life's trunk;  
fear for the poor whose strength is overmatched  
ever more by machines and aggregations  
that rake the sustenance of all to few;  
and there is fear, too, for the precious air  
of freedom, for unguarded talk with friend,  
for sleep at night unhaunted by the sound  
of boots upon the stair, as the grip of Might  
tightens on many a land, while those who will 30  
liberty and equality, are shaken  
apart by random impulse, loss of law,  
and lack of mind to gather all concerns  
in one, foresee, and plan. How far away  
appears fulfillment of that last and hardest  
commandment given to Noah and his children:  
the building of a State whose courts, whose laws

would equitably administer Earth's household!  
Goliath's shadow deepens everywhere,  
and only in those lands where it rests lightest, 40  
where individual will still holds a title  
to action, might our will to life contrive  
to set a lever to the mass of fate.  
Then let us reason of the polity  
in Western lands, hoping to fortify  
some core of resolution, out of which  
a strength might radiate to those who sigh  
for freedom under harsher dispensations.

Democracy: that name by which the West  
has termed such leave of absence from compulsion 50  
which still is granted there. Its premises  
are: that each one of whatsoever rank  
shall have one voice to choose those who shall rule,  
and that the authorities shall recognize  
as greater than themselves the laws that shield  
the citizen from the high hand of power.  
The law and universal suffrage keep  
watch on the hierarchies built by function,  
so that the dignity of all is guarded  
and a place cleared for free exchange of thought. 60  
That is democracy; it is a form  
effective while, to the extent to which  
the people live within it, have not moved  
elsewhere and left the empty scaffold standing.  
And if that has occurred, then it must be  
(seeing that we have placed our faith in form)  
that in their freedom's diagram some corner  
was left unfinished, or an entire side,  
so that they have walked out into compulsion  
unawares, and find ourselves benighted, 70  
far from the house in which they thought to dwell.  
It surely is that in their haste to bar  
the door against the power to coerce,  
the founders did not wholly have in mind  
that there's an obligation to instruct,  
that liberty must be confirmed by law  
which is not made by courts and legislatures  
alone, but by the teachings that descend  
through teachers whom the Spirit authorized

down to the parent lessoning the child. 80  
 And therefore where the people place all faith  
 in the electoral process, those who see  
 have little choice but to look tongue-tied on  
 while multifarious temptations tunnel  
 their way into the house, and clear it out.  
 Not all at once perhaps, but gradually,  
 as weeds and vermin gradually discover  
 the fields we clear, the houses that we build,  
 and change themselves, the better to infest them,  
 did those who take the numbers for their base 90  
 learn how to play to ignorance, appeal  
 to prejudice, hold up the seeming-easy  
 answer to the questions of the crowd  
 that less and less knows what it asks, until  
 today they sell themselves to those whose hands  
 are on the dials that synchronize the music,  
 the simulacra, for the mind-stunned mass.  
 They speak like actors what they did not write  
 and thereby win the power to decide  
 on what they little understand, as pressure 100  
 by bloc and contribution may determine;  
 starting perhaps from the hope of doing good,  
 they soon find strings being tied around their wrists,  
 till the watchers tire of the too-evident  
 puppet-play, and leave their choice uncast.  
 And even those whom urgent warning wakens  
 with message for the whole, appear to take  
 the pattern of their action from this game,  
 competing for the attention of the public  
 with others whom a different urgency, 110  
 and yet the same, impels. Those who most fear  
 the withering of earth, focus their sight  
 upon pollution and extinction, seldom  
 looking where others point to signs of strain  
 in the economic girders that uphold  
 concern itself, when what was made with care  
 is thrown into one market-scale with wares  
 stamped out beneath no regulating law,  
 or turn their heads to see the advancing shadow  
 of force fanatical across the globe; 120  
 while those who fear the stopping of the wheels  
 that feed us, or who post themselves as guardians

of freedom, or who seek to shield earth's heart  
in Israel, see the friends of earth as foes.  
Where roads diverge, yet all lead to one doom,  
easier it is to run divided forward  
under contending standards, than to stay  
in one place, and consider turning back,  
or dig with deeper thought to tunnel under  
the walls that stand upon all obvious ways. 130  
To twist the lures for hypnotized opinion  
that strikes at any bait, so shape and color  
be fashioned to its reflexed expectation,  
and to map out, through the mined field, the sea  
dotted with Scyllas and Charybdises,  
the one course that would get us through unscathed –  
these are two different arts. The second must  
begin far from the market and the polls –  
and maybe far, for now, from learning-places  
that seem but markets of the intellect, 140  
where technical contrivance overtowers  
humanity, and profitable theory  
thrives upon differences that advance  
the individual career, but seldom  
tend to the building of a common world.

But now let us suppose the Hexagon  
founded, if only in the mind as yet,  
that circle of the circles of the circles,  
that House of Wisdom, Sabbath-space to which  
the seekers of the peace of Earth, however 150  
schooled, however occupied, repair  
with tithes of thought, linger in company  
of friends, listening long to song and story,  
then once again depart toward various fields  
that now divide the Earth. Starting from here,  
let us now follow for a little way  
only, the outsets of so many quests!

Let us begin with Law – the law once given  
to all of humankind, as we have heard,  
forgotten long in history's rough and tumble, 160  
but now once more to be articulate.  
We know there is no life without a form,  
nor is there form that is not based on rules.

And as the individual body, so  
 each group that has duration and coherence,  
 is constituted by some law, unwritten  
 or written, known or unknown to the members.  
 Likewise the consciousness of Earth as one  
 body, implies a law that could sustain it.  
 That Hidden Law, which from the Earth's foundations 170  
 must shine up at this hour when they lie  
 so nearly stripped, has shown itself through time  
 in patches to our deepest sense. These patches  
 we shall connect, and with the picture thus  
 obtained, compare the tablets of our codes,  
 from international through national  
 and local law, down to the rules unwritten  
 and written of the circles where we move,  
 even to the workings of the private heart,  
 where love and law inextricably entwine. 180  
 As love recalls us to those selves that fit  
 the Mother's hope for each and all, and binds  
 those who respond in a more perfect union,  
 so may within the social sphere our voices  
 acquire concerted resonance to enlist  
 compulsion's power to remove the snares  
 set for our worsen minds and weaker moments;  
 may legal minds, in trust united, clear  
 the thorny thickets of prevarication  
 where darkest motives have carved out their dens, 190  
 the unfathomable mass of regulation  
 that ever at grips with the complexity  
 of new contrivances conceives itself!  
 They surely shall find legal means to tame  
 that greed-born behemoth, the Corporation,  
 that in our parliaments has risen claiming,  
 in speech where money most unseemly talks,  
 the stature of a person, though ungoverned  
 by any consciousness of human image,  
 threatening personhood, unless we can 200  
 find measures that may dissipate that shape  
 or plant in it a brain that has a conscience.  
 One measure's clear: a law that centers on  
 the human image as we need to be  
 to tend the earth, would know how to define  
 and ban abuses of the human image,

decree that it no longer be hung up  
 as a signboard for commerce, to depict  
 ourselves as puppets of our own possessions,  
 and these possessions too as empty counters 210  
 of power, not things in which the dignity  
 of Earth presents itself to sight and touch.  
 If images and words, we think, have power  
 (in which belief resides our only hope),  
 we must affirm the human form as sacred,  
 surround it with the sanction of the law,  
 forbid its venal use in advertisement —  
 offense by nature public, and the easier  
 banished, without the aid of sleuth or spy,  
 and without harm to freedom of discourse, 220  
 which rather thrives, the more our heads are clear  
 of the conditionings such parodies  
 of human life and human form impose.  
 And from reaffirmation of this sacred  
 we could proceed to ban from public space —  
 from every space that social power can reach —  
 the shows of cruelty, that to our worst  
 offer the image of the violent act,  
 who like the Colosseum crowds cheer on  
 the doers, of whose deeds we wash our hands. 230  
 Most deadly to the common mind is fear  
 of one another; and therefore no less  
 than those mercuric effluents that stun  
 body and mind, should we from circulation  
 withdraw the sights that stimulate such fear,  
 relearn, if not the teaching of the sages  
 not to place stumbling-blocks before the blind,  
 at least the wisdom of the Greeks who, highly  
 thinking of freedom, banished from their stage  
 all direct showing of the dreadful things, 240  
 the mysteries of force, on which they brooded:  
 so drama, by that net of prohibition  
 prevented from the plunge into the abyss,  
 might find itself compelled again to climb,  
 become once more a public introspection,  
 showing the steps that lead toward the abyss  
 and from it, and enlarging choice and wisdom.  
 Let cruelty in obscure rooms thumb over  
 its hideous pictures, where to seek it out

would strengthen force and fear among ourselves; 250  
but let there be again a public space  
clean of it, by purifying statute  
set by the people in the highest seat  
of fundamental law. Then even some  
whom lawless competition now compels  
to court the mass addicted to sensation  
with ever higher doses, may be freed  
from crime's necessity, and in the confines  
of decency may better like themselves.  
The Law: it lives not only by enforcement, 260  
but by acknowledgment, by being set –  
through the deliberation of the people  
in council where each thinks of what is right  
for all, not of their own particular wishes –  
as standard raised above the plane of action,  
a standard without hands at times, and yet  
felt as a presence and an influence.  
Thus even where it is not yet enacted,  
its presence as a shape configuring 270  
in more and more communicating minds  
may yet take gradual effect until  
it win consent and so enact itself.  
So might that best prayer for democracy  
at last be answered, and its soul confirmed.

And likewise to each place where interests clash  
do Understanding's advocates fan out,  
bearing a thought that could impart itself  
not otherwise than as the parents' word  
is uttered to the children, for one purpose 280  
only: that they should learn wisdom, and live.  
If the medium is the message, then the medium  
of needful message is the word that bears  
the touch of care; it is the example set  
of diligent attention to the world  
and earnest effort to communicate  
for all life's sake, in a play of restoration  
to be enacted on a hundred thousand  
stages, each one a part and microcosm.  
It is not the war of classes, though a fair 290  
apportionment of what technology  
must, uncorrected, rake to ruthless hands,



is inescapably an aim included  
in the direction of a general justice;  
for it asks justice even of the oppressed  
not to oppress in turn, but to lay down  
each grievance at the feet of the one Wisdom  
that takes them up. It is not strife of races,  
but equity based on a single standard  
measured by light of insight shining through  
both skin and custom, probing to awaken  
all humans to Circumferential Mind. 300

Nor yet is it the battle of the sexes,  
rather a quest for wiser combination  
of powers, though it lean against the rooted  
pull toward a dominance which ever again  
obscures the attributes we need to call on,  
the individuals we need to see  
and set in Gatherer's place, to give the Mother  
a home on earth, for the sake of every fairness,  
for the sake of universal parenthood 310  
and care for life of coming generations.

By the sharing of our knowledge in the way  
which we have seen, we shall in time construct  
a matrix of response, that to the people  
at large can recommend corrective measures  
not hit-and-miss and at cross-purposes  
(while with undeviating massive logic  
the systems of self-interest function on),  
but from coherent sense of what is needful,  
setting agendas and proposing laws, 320  
pointing out honest candidates for office,  
that suffrage may have meaning once again.

Hard by the road to Law, the way departs  
toward Economics: often will these two  
paths interlace themselves beyond discerning;  
for half of Law is what belongs to whom,  
and all our paths of interchange were paved,  
our castles of possession fortified  
by Law. Yet Law is not identical  
to the logic of the marketplace, whereby, 330  
today, that which is bought and sold too often  
sells and buys the buyers and the sellers,  
makes people over to suit market needs

or casts them off as superfluities  
from a commercial process more and more  
tended by robots, owned by robot-owners—  
Law issues from the center of the human,  
however it be wrested from its source  
by Commerce.

Commerce: ancient as the Word;  
production and exchange, as deep-ingrained 340  
in the human fabric as communication.

We saw how from the dawn of our awareness  
our fate was intertwined with manufacture;  
hunting called forth the weapon, gathering  
the vessel; once our language had configured  
its stock of names, its armature of syntax  
to grasp the world with words, our thinking also  
guided the fingers to articulate  
and to extend itself in implements  
increasingly ingenious; and each such 350  
extension brought new needs and new devisings,  
and for devices, pathways of exchange.

To give one thing so as to get another  
is one sleeve of primordial human habit,  
singling us out, as much as syntax does,  
from all the animals that beg and rob  
and have some dim conception of the sign;  
though in our early aggregations, small  
enough for mutual knowledge, it may be  
that *giving*, which created obligations 360  
the memory of kin retained, to be  
repaid upon some later need, sufficed;

but with the enlargement of the group evolved  
the realm of money, measure of all things,  
keeper of value out of memory,  
which, with contrivance keeping pace, expanded  
to calculations more abstract, abstruse  
beyond the buyer's simple reckonings  
of need or wish, and means. And with each new  
convolution of complexity, 370  
widens the distance between those who need  
and those who at more more removes supply them  
and gradually learn that need itself  
can by manipulation be reshaped  
to the convenience of manufacture,

the buyer modified to suit the product,  
even as the production comes unlinked  
from human labor, as things made by man  
acquire the skills of man, from the arm's heft  
of hammer in the mine, the fingers' threading 380  
of warp and weft, or copying of letters,  
the brain that tabulated cost and price,  
now even the mind interpreting the symptoms  
of illness, the provisions of the law!  
Until it seems the pay of every labor,  
each craft, each skill, and even each profession  
must be diverted to enrich those few  
who skill is in the making of machines  
or acquisition of the means to buy them,  
and almost all save those who make machines 390  
or own them, or who navigate the sunless  
global ocean of exchange of values  
from human values more and more divorced,  
can in John Henry see themselves, whose human  
muscle and heart were overstrained by steam.  
And how shall we now measure our own worth,  
used as we are to measure it by labor,  
by our hands' work, whose occupation's gone?  
It is not, perhaps, the worst, that in the market  
the price of labor sinks to less than buys 400  
the needful for a dignified existence;  
rather that, being so bereft of function,  
having no gift to bring the world, and finding  
no use for their best powers, many see  
no purpose and no meaning in their lives  
and grasp the anodyne of passive pleasure  
which even in want they are supplied,  
or find in cruelties their compensation.  
And even as work itself becomes a good  
difficult to procure, much needful work 410  
remains undone: the nurture of the child  
neglectfully performed, resigned to strangers—  
that sphere contracted whose expansion once  
conferred on humankind its excellence  
and high preeminence above the creatures  
that, soon born and soon finished, unreflecting,  
feed, mate and perish! Nor is youth provided  
with such instruction as may help them stand

against temptations and seek out the good,  
 becoming what the world needs them to be: 420  
 those studies known as “the humanities”  
 become dehumanized and are defunded,  
 and it is long since anyone has deemed  
 the poet’s labor worthy of much hire.  
 It often seems which that which is most needful  
 has the least value in the market which  
 remains as only arbiter of value  
 since, like an acid bath, invention’s progress  
 dissolves community and then attacks  
 the cell of family, and at last splits 430  
 the individual into selfish fractions  
 to each of which a different bait is offered –  
 none left to buy what benefits the Whole!  
 The laws that govern number, and permit  
 our restless ingenuity to father  
 the endless line of engines answering  
 each some discrete demand, solving some problem  
 to benefit the solver, seem to issue  
 in a world void and without form, Creation’s  
 undoing, as the bottom line dissolves 440  
 to dots of nothingness.

Too, we have seen  
 that even as the logic of material  
 contrivance has evolved its consequence,  
 that power of speaking by which Aristotle  
 and Israel’s sages designate the human  
 seems rather to be withering than unfolding –  
 the poets, memory-makers, idled first  
 by the devices that displace the human.  
 Too, language by its nature is averse  
 to being made the property of one 450  
 who then can trade it; poems are not sold  
 as paintings are; the word belongs to all,  
 however commerce struggles to constrain it.  
 A poem is a thing of no location;  
 given to one, it is not kept from others,  
 nor is it alienated from its maker.  
 Praise may be purchased, true – and so may silence;  
 but these, like justice, are commodities  
 worthless when purchased. And when commerce learns  
 to lay its yardstick to the round of time 460

and mark off hours, each worth so many grams  
of bread, the tangle thickens. For who can  
present the log of hours the poem took  
to fashion from experience and desire,  
drawing its threads from past and farthest future,  
its instantaneous form?

But all this is the sign  
of poetry's appurtenance to an order  
that commerce in its hypertrophy threatens:  
the order of the word, which also is  
the order of the home, of kin and friends, 470  
wherein the child matures to personhood  
and to the stature of a citizen.

Here, at the best, it has sometimes been true  
that all receive according to their needs,  
that all contribute what they have to give,  
that property is an appropriate  
belonging, that the thing has dignity,  
and that the house was built to house the dwellers,  
and not the dwellers shaped to fit the house,  
love keeping no accounts but rather counting 480  
on each to do their part, on that good feeling  
by which the presence of good faith is known.

The family! an institution, true,  
too often marred by private tyrannies,  
too often praised by certain who refuse  
to understand how their own enterprises  
impinge upon its walls; while those who flee it  
or would correct its tyrannies, take refuge  
in anonymity of public action

where good intentions struggle to define 490  
an all-too-abstract right that seldom fits  
the persons. But the House of Wisdom stands  
between the private and the public, as  
a place where knowledge of particular things  
is gathered and summed up, not to a number,  
but to a picture wherein each detail  
has place and meaning, where ability  
and need are known and can be used and filled,  
so chartering an economics based

not on the unchecked working of the market 500  
which toward corruption tends to fall and drag  
the humans with it from the social center,

and not on centralized control that makes  
 the people one machine, to grind out goods  
 ordered by overlords of dubious conscience;  
 rather on free endeavor counterpoised  
 by organized awareness and good judgment—  
 a weight whose composition is the alloy  
 of carefulness for life's involved domain,  
 for worker's just reward, consumer's health, 510  
 for honest value of the hard-earned coin,  
 for best use of materials, by which  
 the earth is honored; for just government  
 by those whose ears an honest word can reach—  
 for beauty, in a word which is the sign  
 of opposites resolved, of many gathered  
 in one, of true economy—it is  
 the splendor of that truth which is our life.  
 As on those great trees in Ceylon alight  
 male fireflies, and all at once give signal 520  
 till the whole tree flashes a code of light  
 and dark, and this is possible because  
 the females would be blind to one who flashed  
 out of time: so by consolidation  
 of our responses to result of action  
 that's gain-inspired, we may turn competition  
 into a vying for who best shall please  
 our household spirit, and so earn reward.  
 Thereby we shall enlarge again the home,  
 which now is shrunk so that the sellers hawk 530  
 their wares in every living-room, the mothers  
 scatter to jobs, the children are farmed out  
 to strangers' care and to the free-for-all  
 of peer-groups that too soon teach herd-behavior.  
 If there's to be a future for our foresight,  
 then we must see the children of our kind  
 have shelter in a motherhood instructed,  
 made one with our encompassing concern,  
 and this will be made possible as by  
 the strength of promises redeemed, more can 540  
 entrust themselves to love, and work for love  
 which rightly shall bestow what now is wasted  
 by stimulated vanity and greed.  
 Upon our vision dawns at hope's horizon,  
 as asymptote of hyperbolic striving,

a state in which the word, winged emissary  
from the spirit of the whole, rules all exchange!  
Yet order less extreme could be envisioned,  
where economic contest still continues  
the dance of rivalry, that stimulates 550  
enterprise and invention to provide  
but is constrained by rules that set a limit  
to the effects of contest on the world.  
In place of work, a spirit of wise play  
would govern our endeavors, till the game  
of enterprise would be a game indeed.  
As war refines to sport, so that the victor  
receives rewards, but wounds are not inflicted  
because of rules that chasten competition,  
so in the contest to provide, the winners 560  
might gain points and prerequisites, apportioned  
in the division of the aggregate profit,  
and thus have honor, yet not at the expense  
of others' vital needs. Thus would incentive  
be reconciled with service to the Whole.

If such be possible, at least in thought,  
then not quite vain was that imagination,  
which trailed material cunning's headlong course,  
of labor's end, the lifting of the curse  
laid upon Adam, the return to Eden! 570  
Could the shofar of the ultimate Jubilee  
be sounded in the halls of Economics;  
could it be promulgated and accepted  
that the laws of the material creation,  
once mastered, may not only serve the few  
who ride that whirlwind of unceasing change,  
but must revert, with Earth and all its fullness  
to the original Maker and Possessor,  
and it is laid on all who know to find  
some algorithm of redistribution 580  
that will restore the dignity of Man  
released from labor, and on Earth re-sow  
beauty and thrift in place of sordid waste;  
could those assistants toiling without sweat  
toil equally for all, and if for idled  
hands and minds some play could be devised  
to make life's game again seem worth the candle,

then it would be as if we were allowed  
to taste, at last, the fruit of the Tree of Life,  
which would so sweeten that of the Tree of Knowledge 590  
that we then could get back into the saddle  
and put a bridle on Technology,  
which now is threatening to recast the very  
genetic mold to serve commercial ends,  
while minds that *lose the good of the intellect*  
confuse themselves with their contrivances.  
But yet—like oxygen, that threatened life  
till life learned how to harness its reactions,  
or like the written sign that made so many  
deaf to the inner voice, yet held for some 600  
a mirror to refine their inner vision—  
computers, if we cling to self-awareness  
and mutual aid, conceivably might help us  
configure a communicative matrix  
that could objectively coordinate  
the data of our needs and our resources,  
the effects of action on the sphere of Earth—  
reflecting, thus, our consciousness of Earth  
and helping it to implement itself.

“From each according to ability, 610  
to each according to his need” — that word  
among the friends of Earth shall yet unfold;  
as in the circles which we have described  
the knowledge of particulars shall grow,  
to be stored up in the archive of each level,  
shared by the Gatherers in widening circles.  
The Gatherers and poets shall set tasks,  
match need and gift, instructed by a sense  
of the great Composition they are weaving,  
on Its behalf appeal to Wealth, while Wealth 620  
holds power, and perhaps at last persuade  
Wealth to yield half its kingdom, at the least,  
to the association of the Parents  
of Earth, who with wisdom would distribute  
the bounty which production has amassed  
and place upon Production such demands  
as may be consonant with the health and beauty  
of our surroundings, and with human growth  
toward ever more magnanimous horizons.



Here woman's intellect might find its scope, 630  
at last be comprehended and employed  
as surely it was meant to be. Less fitted  
are women, on the whole, for those endeavors  
that make men great discoverers and gainers;  
great feats of memory, great skill with numbers,  
leaps of invention, are not often theirs;  
yet to their minds the central gift of language  
which makes Community, is most entrusted,  
and they are listeners, receptors, echoes,  
critics at times, to what men may produce. 640  
They tend indeed toward *mediocrity*,  
that middle in which balance must repose,  
in which the true proportions find themselves,  
and things appear as forms to their perception  
and are less broken down. This is perhaps  
that "extra understanding" which the wise  
could see in woman. If it could be cherished,  
then as Distributors there might rise  
the representatives of Her whose shape  
we traced through the better dreams of humankind. 650  
Such figures could not rise in man's despite,  
for She is fashioned not of women's being  
alone, but of the memory in man  
of infant need and its maternal answer.  
Beyond the circle of that early spell  
man has been given power to determine  
not only what becomes of woman but  
what she shall be. If he could but elect  
to see the mortal woman in that image  
and – as a fellow-actor on the stage 660  
supports an actress, chosen as the best  
available to play a numinous role –  
heed her when in such quality she speaks,  
then with the One who as man's counterpart  
and helper fashioned woman, man would share  
the honors of this crowning of Creation!

Indeed the making of the human being  
into that Image that was first intended  
before our hasty grasping after knowledge  
of separate things condemned us to distraction 670

is surely our first industry, which now  
we must resume. Here Israel again  
offers a precedent, in those who sit  
and learn the Law of God as their sole labor,  
often rebuked by those who would return them  
to tasks now grown superfluous! Not idle  
their way of life, but to be emulated,  
adapted to the life we learn to live  
in the light of our new leisure and the abundance  
that shall accrue to all when wisely shared. 680

Such are the bridges that we cross in mind  
before we come to them by roads of action;  
upon such errands would the House of Wisdom  
dispatch us, each according to their knowledge.  
Too gradual this way may now appear  
amid the yapping of emergencies  
from every side; but it is swifter far  
than enterprises greatly undertaken  
but badly underpinned, that tend to list  
toward unforeseen disasters, or subside 690  
in listlessness, when the job remains undone.  
Just as that hero sent to stable-duty  
would not obey the seeming-foolish counsel  
to turn the shovel round and use the handle  
till desperation at the toppling offal  
made him decide to try the strange advice,  
and soon the place was cleared – or as the sage  
who found the short way to be long, returned  
to the long way that was short – may we be governed  
by intellectual consequence that leads us 700  
away, at first, from the scene where we desire  
to act, into an inner world (arcane  
as atoms are, but no less real), from whence  
we may return with force that will not fail,  
a force that is not daunted by our numbers  
(at nine or ten removes, it has been figured,  
each one of us is personally acquainted  
with all) nor scattered by the thought of Might,  
however we may have to flee or fight it.  
We know that, first and last, it is the mind 710  
as principle of gathering and awareness  
must find some language to the scattering forces

and conquer not by them, but by itself;  
yet we suspect (again the ancient tales  
mutter their guidance) that, like all the powers  
that constitute our being, Might must have  
its invitation to the feast, or else  
will surely come, unbidden, with its curse.  
The sages knew that mercy to the cruel  
is cruelty to the merciful; nor will 720  
a war-bent horde be stopped by flags of peace.  
Peace! word so often wielded as a weapon  
against those who desire it most, to buy  
the not-yet-set-upon a space of ease!  
There is no peace save as a common will  
to justice, schooled in forethought for the whole,  
has strength of arm to hold in check the violent  
who would burst forth to overwhelm the just.  
Force against cruelty employed is noble,  
as from the faces of those youthful heroes 730  
whom Israel's dire need has made and lost  
radiates; may the world's vision, to such sights  
clearing, relieve at last that agelong siege!

In the shadow of all threats let us hold fast  
the vision of another *globalism*  
that from Earth's atmosphere's circumference  
looks down on all her tribes and seeks again  
its center in the home of Israel,  
whose thought first rose to meet the eternal Will 740  
and brought a pattern down for human action.  
May the world know that with them is endangered  
the conscience of us all! After the knowledge  
of direst crime against them, what forgiveness,  
what peace, without atonement, which must surely  
import safeguarding of that seedling saved  
from the great conflagration, and replanted  
on devastated soil amid what storms!  
But if that half-made promise of atonement  
could solemnly be reaffirmed and kept, 750  
then it might seem there was a Providence  
even in that homogenizing process  
that blurred so many boundaries, that dissolved  
so many patterns of collective life,  
yet left the kernel of that nation's life

from which the rest, in more harmonious patterns  
reflowering, may yet arrange themselves;  
and if that sanctuary which was once  
a house of prayer for all the nations could  
arise where cursing long has made its den,  
what blessing might stream forth upon the world! 760  
what counsel for all lack and all division!  
And from that people's nursery what sages,  
what matrons and what captains, who will gather  
earth's people in the shelter of her law,  
till the sky's roofbeams once again are made  
secure, and sunlight falls, an unmixed blessing,  
upon a world made safe at last for life.

## Chapter 15

### *Vision of a future Earth.*

The tale of Earth and its long generations,  
of humankind, its character and fate,  
of hope implicit in the human life-form,  
is told, so far as one alone could tell it,  
and the advice of heaven and earth conveyed,  
and I am quit of this great obligation,  
save that before I turn to go my ways  
and leave this word to travel as it can —  
committed, both, to that eternal Wisdom 10  
and Understanding that must hold us all —  
the vision of another Earth entreats  
that I should set it down: an Earth on which,  
by such magnalia as may be hoped  
from spirit grasping after higher form,  
the path marked out hereinbefore was long since  
taken and followed, and what seemed to us  
the unattainable is firm possession  
of human generations, age on age.  
It is an Earth that has known good and evil, 20  
that knows the evil still, yet chooses good  
in vigilance that is heroic feat  
enacted on heart's field by night and day,  
reenacted in the imagination  
and celebrated with the turning year  
in feasts commemorating the redemption  
from what had seemed inevitable fate  
of human being cast into a world  
of lightless forces, yet at last released  
by insight and the vision of the One 30  
from Whom shines forth the Star of Understanding,  
that Point, from which the ground-plan is projected  
of Israel's Temple and, around it ranged,  
the well-proportioned house of humankind,  
the laws of Israel and of the nations,  
the seasons of the turning year, the stations  
along life's road, each marked with some remembrance  
of going forth from Egypt, of the alliance  
for world's integrity, that overcame  
the impediments encountered in the heart  
and all the outward shadows that they cast, 40

recounted in the courses of instruction  
 that bind the growing scion, man or maid,  
 to vigilance at the light of consciousness,  
 that seal again the universal contract  
 of marriage for the sake of life to come,  
 secured for good against the might of fear,  
 the hissing counselors of envy, and  
 the undertow of violence pleasure-wrapped.  
 Still meet on earth the circles of good counsel, 50  
 joined everywhere the first night of the moon,  
 hearing the word each finds to say, then sending  
 the wisest to a new assembly met  
 the second night, till when the orb is full  
 they gather from all corners of the earth—  
 perhaps indeed no longer in the body  
 but in some room in the world's inner space  
 by all-intentness hollowed and made firm  
 for the hour of Understanding's fullest light—  
 and then to the peripheral assemblies  
 return by stages, like the emanations 60  
 of Divine Being in the Kabbala.  
 Because the circles call on Understanding,  
 the true name of what holds the world together,  
 it does not fail them, nor in course of time  
 does dissolution creep into that form,  
 but ever again discovering itself  
 in what is new each day, it can absorb  
 Time's messages, and find them answers from  
 that ground that has the clarity of light,  
 the restfulness of dark; whose light and dark 70  
 illumine now a stage where the play of life  
 goes on, yet has assumed another meaning.  
 Those born into that world are not abandoned  
 to grope their way toward whatsoever tree  
 chance and the random urge plant on their paths  
 while half-told tales confuse the paths of guidance,  
 but of the stream that flows from Sinai's height,  
 to which all other streams are tributary,  
 they drink with their first taste of human speech.  
 Secured from doubt they learn their origins 80  
 in the long double spiral from the dust  
 and in the hidden pull of future being;  
 they learn to see the pattern of their acts

just as they learn the alphabet; they learn  
 to read their dreams, to catch the inmost voice  
 in those songs which the Mother of all minds  
 bestows, as talismans of integrity,  
 upon each of her children. They become  
 versed in the symbols and the signs that show  
 both enemy and friend within themselves, 90  
 they learn to look Medusa in the eye,  
 to slay the dragon; and they also learn  
 to see, awake, the partners of their dreams,  
 their destined kin. For of such bonds, cemented  
 by tokens of the single dream that are  
 like halves of broken rings to which one seeks  
 the complement, the social fabric's woven,  
 in ritual but solemnly displayed.  
 Through friendship they interpret one another  
 to those more distant in the mind; and those 100  
 who find with quickest sense the inward ways  
 that run from mind to mind, are known to all  
 from childhood on, as humankind's true guides.  
 With calm exactitude the ones who teach them,  
 like scientists that study living things  
 and minerals, find out the properties  
 of every mind, and see where it best fits  
 the enterprise of planetary maintenance  
 to which the race is pledged, and what must be  
 pruned in each temperament for higher growth; 110  
 and such is possible because the voice  
 of common thought has silenced strife of rank,  
 so that to one circumference and center  
 all orient themselves, and every gift  
 they husband as the property of all.  
 Through the direction of the inner eye  
 youth finds its mate; and that same wisdom calls  
 the children, one by one, into the world,  
 to place prepared and kindred expectation.  
 It is no world of arbitrary freedom 120  
 that proves itself by choosing to destroy  
 rather than carry out another's will  
 and makes a world mechanical, condemned  
 to repetition of monotonous act,  
 the same, the more variety is sought;  
 it rather is a world of binding insight

which being acknowledged forms the stair whereby  
 mind mounts to contemplate a wider circle  
 of forms, of lives, and to gaze deeper in  
 to the nature of the universe, dispersed 130  
 by scattering force to endless realms of space  
 which yet are spanned and gathered in again  
 by sympathy, by love that overrides  
 both time and space, forming its vehicles  
 even of the very matter of dispersion,  
 and, at the limit, overstrides the thresholds  
 of birth and death. For if the cracks be closed  
 that sunder mind from mind within this world,  
 the world of separation, who can say  
 but that the dead we exile with our fear 140  
 might move with certain presence in our midst,  
 their destiny unfolded to our insight,  
 and the unborn make known their will to be  
 as to the singer's ear the song announces  
 its coming while yet inarticulate?  
 And as the single sphere of all our knowing  
 becomes with generations more intent,  
 who is to say but that its listening  
 might find the inner path even to the stars  
 despite the distances that yawn before 150  
 the farthest surge of our Icarian skill,  
 and we in true dreams given through the spirit  
 of unity, from other worlds made one  
 even as ours, might visit far beyond  
 the event-horizon of material light?  
 Not upon curiosity alone,  
 if the hope that inspired our thought has substance,  
 the boon would be conferred; only on mind  
 that sought to read Creation as a book  
 showing the Author's thought, and to partake 160  
 in the Creator's wisdom and delight;  
 so might the Consciousness of Earth become  
 a microcosm of universal mind,  
 as in the single human we behold  
 reflection of the Consciousness of Earth:  
 the final evolution for which ages  
 of life lived on this sphere might be enough,  
 before the final cataclysm shatter  
 this husk of rock, and spirit that here built



a dwelling to its measure, be ingathered 170  
to the eternal being, to be sent forth  
on new errand, or held beyond all time.

Has all this dream a substance? Dark and cold  
the surface of the present closes over  
the vision. We have built but to destroy,  
and perhaps also that above destruction  
the rainbow of the might-have-been might form,  
or that, the mass of this world being crushed,  
a high Discernment, housed in some dimension  
that is but tangent to our own, might cull 180  
from the debris some insight, like a crystal  
in which the lost is magically contained.

Or is it indeed for nothing, and the sense  
of inner destiny a mere organic  
delusion of the cells? Of this we know  
no more than Pascal knew, when he declared  
all faith a wager; yet he also said  
that the true knowledge knows not till it loves.  
We know that love alone could yet restore  
the face of the creation we have marred, 190  
yet it cannot be love for what we have been,  
who have become the unmakers of this earth,  
but love for that which we would need to be  
in order to reverse that entropy

of which we are the motor; and therefore  
as mirror of our own reformed self-love  
that distant world appears. May we behold.  
May you, whether or not you are to be,  
O our descendants! dwellers in that dream,  
friends in the future, at whose festivals 200  
we would be guests, attend us, that we live  
not in this hour alone, but have safe-conduct  
through the turmoil of those who pursue  
survival at the price of all they are!

I gaze into that world and seem to see  
them lift a hand in greeting and in pledge  
they will, against the dead weight of our past,  
will their being, and so draw us on.

Soul of the world, O shadow-light projected  
from the Source beyond all being: it is done. 210

Do now the rest, if more remains to do:  
find this word ears; and guide my further steps  
into the room of minds that will themselves,  
as this one does, to the Consciousness of Earth.

## NOTES

Nothing is so inimical to “scholarly accuracy” as the process of poetic composition. As John Livingston Lowes points out in *The Road to Xanadu*, his account of the composition of Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Kubla Khan,” the materials on which the poet draws must be absorbed and subconsciously assimilated to the point at which they lose their own identities, before a new whole can take shape from them. Thus, *The Consciousness of Earth* draws on many sources, not all of which I am able to identify, but I have tried to identify the sources of the most important ideas.

*The Road to Xanadu* helped crystallize one of this poem’s organizing concepts. The light shed on poetic creation by the demonstration of how the creative imagination worked upon a chaotic mass of information, seemed also to fall on the creation of living forms, offering a *tertium quid* to reductionism and “creationism” as crudely understood. This intuition resonated with the hypothesis of the “self-organizing universe” (see Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, *Order out of Chaos*, also Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *What is Life?*, and Freeman Dyson, *Origins of Life*).

### Chapter 1

The opening passage is adapted from Schell (Avon, 1982, pp. 153-4). The notion of a “consciousness of earth” asserted itself, as I noted in the introduction, in response to Schell’s title *The Fate of the Earth*, as a protest against fatalism. The opposition of consciousness to fate is, of course, an ancient one; it is part of the debate between the “Hebraists” and the “Hellenists,” the former claiming that a direct relation to the Creator of the Universe exempts one from the entanglements of fate. This attitude is exemplified in the saying “Israel has no horoscope.” It is particularly associated with the figures of Abraham and of Rabbi Akiba; it was reasserted after the great recent catastrophe in Erich Gutkind’s mad and magnificent book *Choose Life* (which, of course, like this chapter, echoes Deuteronomy 30:19), and (as I read it) in Paul Celan’s “Meridian” speech. The “Meridian” seems to me to be moving toward the concept of a consciousness of earth. More widely known are the theories of Teilhard de Chardin (*The Phenomenon of Man*, *The Future of Man*, *Human Energy*) and J.E. Lovelock’s *Gaia*, with its idea of an organic intentionality guiding the ecosphere as a whole. Lines 56-58 echo the Hasidic perception of God’s desire for a “dwelling-place in the nether regions.”

### Chapter 2

“...that they are nothing more than its decrees...” I am indebted to Rabbi Haim Tabasky for explaining to me the view that while “natural” and “miraculous” events proceed equally from the Divine will, the “natural” laws represent a “vow” on the part of the Eternal to do things in a certain way.

“In the beginning...” The “Big Bang” theory of cosmic origins is here conflated with the Second Law of Thermodynamics—a poetic conjunction about which I have heard differing opinions expressed by scientists.

### Chapter 3

“...pledging our consciousness no happenstance.. but primarily envisioned end of all”: The idea that the universe looks as if it had been designed so as to foster consciousness is known as the anthropic principle. Martin Rees (*Just Six Numbers*) has countered this with the “multiverse” hypothesis, according to which all the possible universes eventuate, so that a life-fostering universe would represent only another random variant.

“Was the decree cast in that fiery furnace...” This passage replies to Steven Weinberg’s *The First Three Minutes*, and generally to the tendency to identify temporal priority with causality.

“...twin particles that, separated, act/ as from a placeless joining...” This is Bell’s experiment, as described by Gary Zukav in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*.

“...psychic force that deigns to show its hand...” See the extensive treatment of “parapsychology” in Chapter IX.

### Chapter 4

Some of the recent (or, by this rewriting, fairly recent) theories on the origins of life are summarized by Freeman Dyson (*Origins of Life*) and by Lynn Margulis, Dorion Sagan and Nils Eldredge (*What Is Life?*).

“... cells entered into other cells...” : based on Lynn Margulis, *Symbiosis and Cell Evolution: Life in its Environment on the Early Earth*.

### Chapter 5

The account of primate evolution represents an overlay of several different theories. Among the works consulted were Richard Leakey, *Origins*; Alison Jolly, *The Evolution of Primate Behavior*; J.B. Birdsell, *Human Evolution*; and Edward O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology*. To describe the evolution of human behavior is to enter a complex discussion with social as well as scientific meaning. Sources for the first writing included Peter Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid*; Margaret Mead’s *Sex and Temperament*; Desmond Morris’ *The Naked Ape*; Lionel Tiger’s *Men in Groups* and *The Imperial Animal*; Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born*; Dorothy Dinnerstein’s *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*; Levi-Strauss’ *La Pensée Sauvage*; various essays by Stephen Jay Gould; and Melvin Konner’s *The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit*. For the 2004 edition I consulted Carol McGilligan, *In a Different Voice*; Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*; Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (a plaidoyer for the theory of group selection); Ian Tattersall, *Becoming Human* (on the Neanderthal and other early humans); *The Evolution of Culture*, edited by Robin Dunbar, Chris Knight and

Camilla Power (in that collection, Geoffrey Miller's "Sexual Selection for Cultural Displays" supplied the speculation about courtship as a factor in the evolution of intelligence); Dunbar, *Gossip, Grooming, and the Evolution of Language*; and several works by Derek Bickerton, particularly *Language and Species*. The reference to the Uncarved Block follows Bickerton, p. 93.

What came into focus in the more recent readings was the view that human evolution has been driven by language, as a tool of both communication and cognition, even more than by tool-making. Long ago, Aristotle labeled man as the "speaking" (in contrast to inanimate, vegetable and animal) being, a terminology that has entered the mainstream of Jewish thought.

## Chapter 6

The list of characteristics of human societies is taken mainly from Wilson's *Human Nature*; the observation on syntax and association is added. Christopher Boehm's *Hierarchy in the Forest* and Derek Bickerton's *Language and Species* filled in some gaps in the picture of language and society. The passage on the original role of the poet draws on Shelley's classic "Defence of Poetry," Richard Moore's "Poets" in *Pygmies and Pyramids*, and scattered observations in works on sociobiology and anthropology. If the latter disciplines have yet to focus on poetry as a key to human nature, this is doubtless due to poetry's apparent superfluity in technological society. The cathedral as metaphor for the human mind is taken from Steven Mithen's *The Prehistory of the Mind*; juxtaposed with this image is Kafka's image of a castle composed of huts. Gordon Childe's *The Prehistory of European Society* and *Man Makes Himself* furnished some of the details in the account of Homo sapiens' early progress. For the development of agriculture and civilization, the main source was Charles Redman's *The Rise of Civilization*.

I believe that at some point I read some works by Mary Midgely and derived something from them, and regret that my recollection here is not more exact.

The description of the figures from Old Europe comes from Marija Gimbutas' *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Gimbutas' idyllic picture of the pre-Indo-European past is counterbalanced by some observations and reflections from Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*, which compiles prehistoric and recent evidence of violent conflict in primitive society (and is a very impressive work, written with dispassionate carefulness, on the nature of war and peace).

"But knowledge travels with another pace..." Here I am again summarizing Schell (pp. 101-103). On the nature of technology see Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (to which an extensive riposte, "I, Human," appears in my *Handbook of Macropoetics*). Joseph Needham's *The Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West*, which examines the reasons why science came to full flower in Western rather than Chinese civilization, furnished much material

for this chapter, including the discussion of Galileo's method. Also helpful was *A Short History of Technology from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1900*, by Trevor I. Williams and T.K. Derry.

"The way a star in burning fuses first..." This passage was influenced by Jeremy Rifkin's *Entropy*. On the mineral resources problem, see Eugene N. Cameron, *At the Crossroads*. Herbert Daly's *Steady-State Economics* was also useful.

## Chapter 7

Most of this chapter is based on ideas which during the '60's and '70's were "in the air." I have already cited the sociobiologists as proponents of that form of social Darwinism which made a comeback in response to the "liberation" movements. Additional sources included Joseph Weizenbaum's *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation*; Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Abolition of Television*; and Edward S. Herman's *The Real Terror Network*, an early exposé of capitalism's effect on the Third World. Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred*, published between the first and second versions of this work, offers a very similar view of late capitalism. The view of Marxism taken here is that of Gustav Landauer in his *Call to Socialism*. In an essay written around 1920, the poet Ossip Mandel'shtam, who in the '30's was to fall victim to Stalin's purges, used the images of Egypt and Babylon to describe his premonitions of the Soviet future. This writer once visited an atelier in Kiev where only colossal statues of Lenin were being produced. The Easter Island parable is the theme of Paul Bahn and John Flenley, *Easter Island, Earth Island*. The view of the Hellenistic or Second Temple period is based on extensive reading during the 1970's. Timothy Freke's provocative *The Jesus Mysteries* brought certain aspects of this period into sharper focus and led me to an older work, Samuel Angus' *The Mystery-Religions and Christianity*. The view of the "third great monotheistic religion" is based on its own scriptures (Arberry translation) as well as a number of books by sympathetic observers such as Raphael Patai (*The Arab Mind*) and Jonathan Raban (*Arabia: A Journey Through the Labyrinth*). For the history of the Arab empire see Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History*. Several works by Bernard Lewis were also consulted.

"...humankind's breath-stop of recognition...": an echo of *Atemwende* (breath-turn), the title of Celan's fifth collection.

## Chapter 8

"...and would it be for us/ or for some creature which we almost were..": Lately, on the Internet site Goodreads, I saw this remark by David Gross: "I wonder if her outlook was intended for some post-human species and landed here by mistake."

While revising this section I encountered the thought of Sir Karl Popper (*The Open Universe* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*), who also felt the need to ground human freedom in a scientific view that leaves room for the undetermined.

"Easy is descent...": cf. Vergil's *Aeneid* 6:126 ("Facilis descensus Averno...").

"...and not a way/ that we can go?" Schiller's tragic hero Wallenstein prays: "Show me a way out of this dark impasse, A way that I can go!"

"By strongest light of analytic mind" : cf. Kafka ("Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope, and the True Way," translated by the Muirs in *The Great Wall of China*): "In a light that is fierce and strong one can see the world dissolve."

"More a great thought than a great machine" –the astronomer Sir James Jeans.

"... something like a weaving hand..." Jung's notion of synchronicity (see his introduction to the I Ching) has been influential.

The scientific-metaphysical debate in this chapter goes back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. The view that there are only "particle-flurries" and the rest is "opinion" derives from Parmenides (as quoted in Celan's "Stretta"). Heraclitus said that "war is the father of all things"; Empedocles held that the interaction of love and hate creates the universe.

As a non-mathematician, I cannot follow the reasoning behind Goedel's theorem; but it is said that Goedel himself drew theistic conclusions from it.

The idea of harmonic structures in the universe is an ancient one, recently represented by, among others, the French physicist Joel Sternheimer.

"...between a world of born, and one of made" : cf. e.e. cummings, "Pity This Busy Monster, Manunkind."

In the *Pensées*, in a passage that has become known as "Les deux infinis," Pascal contemplates our position between the astronomic and the microscopic dimensions.

## Chapter 9

Since the original writing of this chapter, the openness to "parapsychology" appears to have decreased; I attribute this to the increasingly overbearing presence of material technology (some years ago I said to a friend half-jokingly that the Internet interferes with telepathy, and I still think there may be something in it). An edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which I consulted in 1982 had an extensive and serious article on the subject; the one which had replaced it by 2000 dismissed the subject a brief note. My own openness to the subject began with the experience I attempt to document in *The Time of the Other: Poet and Reader in the Work of Paul Celan*. The treatment here is based on extensive reading—from laboratory reports to the memoirs of mediums who inspired confidence in varying degrees. Belief in the paranormal is not an all-or-nothing matter (see the end of Freud's "Psychoanalysis and Telepathy!"); skepticism exists at all levels in the field itself. Most "laboratory" parapsychologists do not appear to believe in the survival of the soul; Louisa Rhine, in a study of anecdotal evidence

(*The Invisible Picture*), concludes that all “psi” phenomena may be reduced to clairvoyance and psychokinesis on the part of monadic subjects, eliminating even the hypothesis of communication between living minds as such. The psychoanalyst Jule Eisenbud, whose writing is highly intelligent, likewise emphasizes the egoistic motives of those who have “psi” experiences, is skeptical of survival, and explains mediumistic experiences as psychological projections helped out by clairvoyance. Yet he also says the paranormal is difficult to explain without invoking a “mind of God.” The notion that precognition may be self-fulfilling prophecy – that the predictor may influence the predicted events through psychokinesis and hypnosis at a distance—is advanced by Eisenbud (*Paranormal Foreknowledge*). Robert Kastenbaum’s *Is There Life After Death* summarizes most of the arguments; for reincarnation, see Ian Stevenson’s *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*.

“...the laws of Probability themselves”: Eisenbud cites the mathematician Karl Marbe to the effect that “the answer to the riddle of why events fall out in conformity to the logic of probability had to be looked for in the psychological sphere” rather than in formal logic itself; Eisenbud believes that probability implies a “totality of all events” which is imbued with awareness.

“...thought’s images were printed without light”: refers to the “thoughtographer” Ted Serios; Eisenbud’s *The World of Ted Serios* describes this peculiar phenomenon and answers the skeptics in a reasonable-sounding manner. In *Parapsychology and the Unconscious* Eisenbud wonders why the scientific world has been so reluctant to accept the evidence for the paranormal; but this reluctance is consistent with the reductionist mindset as analyzed in the preceding chapter.

“...not only thought, but myth”: Muriel Rukeyser wrote in *The Speed of Darkness*: “The Universe is made of stories,/ Not atoms.”

In Lurianic Kabbala the Creation meant an original exile from the Divine fullness; see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*.

## Chapter 10

“...common truth”: This phrase occurs in Celan’s next-to-last poem.

“The elephant...” Sources for this chapter, besides the sociobiological works above mentioned, include Irving Janis’ *Groupthink*, Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence*, Erich Fromm’s *The Forgotten Language*, and the depiction of the mother-child relationship in Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.

“And if I-Am, imprisoned...” Cf. Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man*, who compulsively isolates himself to preserve his “freedom”!

“... to integrate/ all alienness into its own design”: cf. the Baal Shem Tov (in Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim: Early Masters*): “... to struggle time after time with the extraneous, and time after time to uplift it into the unity of the Divine Name.”



"... the eyes of all into one compound vision..." cf. Teilhard's essay "Human Unanimisation" (in *The Future of Man*). Aquinas wrote that the angels "always see each other in the Word." Teilhard notes "a mutual repulsion dominant in the human mass" which resists the unanimizing eros. "... the shadow/ that falls between conception and creation" an allusion to T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" is meant.

## Chapter 11

"... or if through deprivation known..." Both Edgar Allan Poe and Gerard de Nerval, two poets consumed with longing for a lost realm, lost their mothers at a very early age, ad did Dante.

"...re clothe us in our rightful mind": from a hymn by John Greenleaf Whittier, "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind." As noted in the next chapter, recognition of the Mother does not imply dismissal of everything associated with "patriarchal religion"!

"to catch the massive inarticulate prayer": after writing this line I read in Wikipedia that the name of Kuan Yin, who has occasionally been conflated with the Madonna, means "Perceives the Sounds of the World."

"To the wisest king": see Prov. 8:22-9:6.

Sources for the Wisdom archetype include the "Gospel of Helen" relayed by Irenaeus (see R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*), Jung's *Man and His Symbols*, and the works of Gershom Scholem. The poem alternates between the names Wisdom and Understanding. In the Kabbala the name "Wisdom (Chokhmah)" is given to the second Sefirah, also called Abba (Father), which represents the "point" of intuition; in the third Sefirah known as Understanding Binah), Mother (Imma) and Return (Teshuvah) this point expands into an articulate structure. In universal usage, the Mother archetype is usually called Wisdom.

"... the shape of all shapes..." I should note that in the transcript of the interview on which Black Elk Speaks is based (*The Sixth Grandfather*, edited by Raymond Mallie), this phrase does not occur. But since Black Elk was speaking through an interpreter to a fellow-mystic with whom he felt a psychic connection, it seems possible that this addition of Neihardt's was based on an accurate intuition.

"...in that great night..." "In the great night my heart will go out,/ Toward me the darkness comes rattling." From *Technicians of the Sacred*, ed. by Jerome Rothenberg.

The description of the *Commedia* as a "word-crystal" comes from Mandelstamm's "Conversation about Dante."

"the fate of Holy Wisdom upon earth"—In *The Web of What Is Written* I traced this "plot" in the works by Flaubert, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Rilke, Kafka, Proust, and Pynchon.

"Laura Reichenthal" : the original name of Laura (Riding) Jackson, who attempted to minimize her Jewish origins, but whose thought in *The Telling* (see the chapter on her in *The Web of What Is Written*) seems unconsciously rooted in Jewish tradition.

## Chapter 12

“excursions/ to the outside”: See also my essay “Continuing the Conversation about Dante” (in *A Handbook of Macropoetics*).

“for the sake of life”: see Deut. 30:19: “...I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live.”

“as the Source/ of freedom” : The Ten Commandments begin: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.”

“freedom, which the Law was meant to guard”: Ex. 32:17 speaks of “the writing of God, graven (charut) upon the tables”; in Avot 6:2 R. Yehoshua ben Levi reads this homiletically: “Read not *charut* (graven) but *cherut* (freedom), for there is no free man save the one who occupies himself with Torah study.”

“the loyal student”: “R. Elazar said in the name of R.Haninah: Whoever says a thing in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world.” (Megillah 17a)

“the small containing that which seemed the greater” : the phrase “the lesser that contains the greater” stems from the Midrash (Gen. Rabba 5, 7); I have encountered the concept in various contexts, from the writings of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav to the poems of Mandelstamm, and it seems to me related to the sense of “miniaturization” I often get from Celan’s work.

“Ur Kasdim”: Rashi (Gen. 15:5) interprets this place name as “fiery furnace” and cites a midrash that Abraham smashed the idols of Nimrod, the ruler of Babel, and was thrown into a fiery furnace from which he miraculously emerged unharmed (Rashi on Gen. 28).

“whence Abraham was beckoned forth, detached”: “Go out of your land, and from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to the land I will show you.” (Gen. 12:1)

“he was led out”: Rashi on Gen. 15:5 (“And he brought him forth outside and said: Look now towards heaven, and count the stars”): “The midrashic explanation is: Go forth from your astrology—that you have seen by the planets that you will not raise a son ... I will give you other names and your horoscope (destiny) will be changed ... He brought him forth from the terrestrial sphere, elevating him above the stars.”

“not heaven but one tract of earth was set”: again Gen. 12:1.

“horror of great darkness”: Gen. 15:12. This phrase is generally taken to sum up one aspect of Jewish history. Rashi writes, “This is symbolic of the woes and the gloom of Israel in exile.” Nachmanides cites an interpretation of this phrase whereby each word is taken to refer to one of the empires, from Babylon to Rome under which the Jewish people would be exiled. The exile of Rome (Edom) is said to be still continuing.

The association of Egypt with determinism is an interpretation I have heard more than once. A Hasidic work, *Degel Machaneh Efrayim*, explains that Pharaoh did not know the Ineffable Name (the Tetragrammaton) but only the name Elokim, which is associated

with the laws of nature, and cites a Tannaitic statement (Mekhilta 18:11) that “no slave ever escaped from the prison of Egypt.” This thought resonates for me with the rebellion against determinism which I trace in the “Meridian” speech (see *Western Art and Jewish Presence in the Work of Paul Celan*).

“... almost each trace” refers to the field of Biblical archaeology. Rather as in the debate on parapsychology, it is hard to tell where objectivity ends and the wish to disprove the spiritual begins, though, of course, when it comes to denying the historicity of the First Temple it is clear that Objectivity has long left the scene. In 1976, as a research assistant, I read a great deal on this subject, as well as on the “intertestamental” (i.e. Second Temple) period, and this and the following passage summarize my impressions. As I trust is clear, this work’s “defense of Judaism” is not based on correlations of text and scientific findings, rather on the appositeness of the vision to the human predicament generally, and the steadfastness with which the vision has been maintained.

“...seven laws”: The concept of the “Noahide laws” is derived from Gen. 9:4-6, from which the Talmudic sages deduced seven laws. The Noahide movement has recently experienced a revival; see, for instance, [www.en.noahideworldcenter.org](http://www.en.noahideworldcenter.org). The use which this chapter makes of this concept represents what I hope is a responsible extension of the traditional view.

“the bitterest foes of Israel”: An enlightening book on the Jewish-Roman confrontation is Martin Goodman’s *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*. David Nirenberg’s *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* is one incisive treatment of subsequent relations.

“not understanding yet”: See 24:7: “And he took the book of the covenant and read it in the ears of the people, and they said, “All that the Eternal has spoken we will do and we will hear (or: understand)” – that is, commitment to the Torah as the command of God preceded understanding of its provisions. I have applied this here to the process in which the written Torah has been interpreted over the centuries (the “oral Torah”).

“the multifoliate rose of Kabbala”: *The Zohar*, the central Kabbalistic text, begins with the image of the rose which symbolizes the community of Israel.

My impressions of Kabbala still owe much to the work of Gershom Scholem, but I have also read various works by Rabbi Yitzchak Ginzburgh (e.g. *Torat HaNefesh*) and hope that what I am relaying about the sfirot is fairly standard.

“proposing their own versions of the code”: The last major codifier of Jewish law, Rabbi Joseph Karo, was a Kabbalist.

“a hoard of precious apothegms is treasured”: the tractate Avot (a title variously translated as “sayings of the fathers,” “ethics of the fathers,” “chapters of the fathers” and included in the prayerbook for study on Sabbath afternoons during the period of the counting of the omer).

“a light/ that shows the world from one end to the other”: I first encountered this concept in Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *The Sabbath*; it stems partly from the Babylonian Talmud (Chagiga 12a): “For R. Eleazar said: The light which the Holy One, blessed be He, created on the first day, one could see thereby from one end of the world to the other; but as soon as the Holy One, blessed be He, beheld the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion, and saw that their actions were corrupt, He arose and hid it from them, for it is said: But from the wicked their light is withholden. And for whom did he reserve it? For the righteous in the time to come[.]” The Sabbath is considered “a foretaste of the world to come.”

“the ascending count”: the counting of the omer during the 49 days between Passover and Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. It is a time (especially the first 33 days) when weddings are not held, there is no instrumental music and no shaving or cutting of hair (a sign of mourning).

“because they failed to honor one another”: the Talmud (Yevamot 62b) relates: “It is said that Rabbi Akiba had twelve thousand pairs of students...and they all died in the same time-period because they did not give one another honor...It is taught that they all died between Passover and Shavuot.”

“an invitation/ to all Earth’s peoples”: The seventy bulls offered during the seven days of the Sukkot holiday are said to be offered in atonement for the nations of the world; Zechariah prophesies (14:16) that in the end of days “every one that is left of all the nations who came against Jerusalem, shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the festival of Sukkot.”

“Concede the harm/ our word has authorized when snatched from us” : The translation of the Hebrew scriptures into other languages is viewed by the tradition with mixed feelings at best; the fast of the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, which commemorates the day the Babylonians surrounded Jerusalem, also commemorates the translation of the Torah into Greek! In the oral Torah, which of course was not translated, the harsher provisions of the written Torah are generally reinterpreted or their application limited to cases unlikely to occur.

“For what is all the structure of our Law”: It is said that the 248 positive commandments correspond to the organs of the body and the 365 negative commandments to the sinews, so that taken together they represent the Divine image in man.

“that taste for stolen waters”: “Stolen waters are sweet” (Prov. 9:17)

“the Egyptian servitude/ of days, of weeks unmarked by pause for rest”: In the *kiddush* (sanctification) recited before the Sabbath evening meal, the Sabbath is described as “a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt.”

“The objectivity of judgment”: God is understood as having an “attribute of mercy” and an “attribute of judgment.” The latter is associated with the Divine name Elokim and the laws of nature.

“rises the figure of a bearded man”: these lines describe the best-known portrait of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Chief Rabbi

of Israel, who was both a Zionist and a universalist philosopher (I see some affinity between him and Teilhard de Chardin). The passage following attempts to summarize part of his argument in *Orot HaTechiyah (Lights of Renewal)*, a section of his most widely-read book, *Orot*. In that book he wrote, "Israel and its essence are not confined to a restricted private circle. They are concentrated in a unique circle, and from that center they exert an influence on the whole circumference."

"Already Jeremiah, long ago": "The heart is deceitful above all things, and grievously weak; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9)

"the two halves/ of the Divine image": cf. Gen. 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." One interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 is that God first created man as an androgynous creature, then separated the two halves.

"to the counsels of a universal justice": See Gen. 18:17-25.

"in the universal mind a metaphor": the "circumcision of the heart," already in Deut. 10:16.

"The hymn/ that welcomes in the Sabbath": "*Lekha dodi*," composed by Rabbi Solomon Halevy Alkabetz around 1540.

"may keep it with a difference": Jewish Sabbath observance is defined by abstaining from thirty-nine categories of activities which are halakhically defined as "work." Halakha allows non-Jews to keep the Sabbath provided they do at least one action that falls into one of these categories.

"Paul Celan": the reference is to the last two poems in the posthumous collection *Zeitgehöft (Timestead)*.

"the solemn chant that brings the Sabbath in": the Kiddush.

"even by the unborn": Talmudic commentary on Ex. 15:2 (Sota 30-31).

"that the momentum of the wheel of fortune": Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook interprets the laws of the sabbatical year in this fashion (see Rav Kook's *Introduction to Shabbat Ha'Aretz*, bilingual edition translated and with an introduction by Julian Sinclair, New York: Hazon, 2014).

"to the Maker and Preserver of the world": this passage is a partial paraphrase of the Amidah, the central portion of the Jewish daily prayer. The Noahide World Center ([www.noahideworldcenter.org](http://www.noahideworldcenter.org)) offers a version of the Jewish prayerbook for Noahides.

"... whose firmness made the mother's circle just"—an echo of Donne's "A Valediction, Forbidding Mourning."

"an extra understanding in the woman": "the Holy One, blessed be He, endowed the woman with more understanding than the man" (Niddah 45b).

"the voice of Psalms aspires": "From straits I called to God, God answered me with expansion" (Ps. 118:5)—a verse that I hear in the background of Celan's work.

"Utopia": In "The Meridian" Celan twice employs the word "Utopia," the first time in a purely abstract sense, the second time with a hint of greater concreteness. In the same speech he mentions Gustav Landauer, a Utopian socialist whose influence on Celan was profound. In the Bremen speech he speaks of "stars of human manufacture," meaning the recently-launched artificial satellites; several poems also speak of the launching of the poem as a mental "satellite.")

"*Ayelet haShachar*": the morning star.

"...the soul's most natural prayer": in "The Meridian" Celan says in the name of Malebranche: "Attention is the natural prayer of the soul." "Attention" is also a key word for Simone Weil.

"Even by that sting one poet learn to use": one of the early twentieth-century Russian poets said that he knew a poem was good when it cause him to feel envy.

"...the roads that go from poem to poem..." Harold Bloom, in the *Anxiety of Influence*, suggests we study these "roads" as an antidote to "misprision," to the tendency he identifies in poets to misunderstand one another "so as to clear imaginative space for themselves." This passage responds to Schell's stricture: "There is no record of several poets' having independently written the same poem, or of several composers' independently having written the same symphony." True; but there is no record of scientists' having written identically worded papers either, and two poems can quite well point to the same thing (as *The Web of What Is Written* attempts to demonstrate). One small example: compare the line "the path that leads out of the death-locked maze" in Chapter 1, with Auden's "The Maze," which to the best of my memory I had not read before writing the line.

"..light by which they read..." An allusion to Celan's poem "Voices" is intended.

"... power to make over": Cf *Black Elk Speaks*:

A good nation I shall make live,

This the nation above has said.

They have given me the power to make over.

Concerning the circle, Black Elk writes: "You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round."

"...mend the world..." The concept of world-repair (*tikkun ha-'olam*), which has become something of a buzz-word in recent years, stems from the Kabbala, where it is associated with esoteric methods. However, Scholem also suggests that a secular Kabbala could be constructed based on literature and everyday experience. In Martin Buber's Hasidic novel, *For the Sake of Heaven*, one of his sages tells an inquirer: "You tell me, Prince Adam, that you can find no thread. You can see none so long as you are willing to try less than the disentanglement of the whole. The beginning and the beginning alone is placed into the hands of men. But it is placed in them.

Simply make a beginning and at once you will see all about you, in the very circle of your personal activity, all kinds of threads. You will have to grasp but a single one of them and it will be, if God wills it, the right one. Others will do even as you have done and what will come to pass, will come to pass."

Counterclockwise: The counterclockwise motion is suggested by a Celan poem that speaks of moving "wider die Zeit (against time)," as well as by the fact that in Kabbala the emanation called Mother or Understanding is also called Return.

"...so leave our thought the freer to unfold": in his essay "On Rhyme" Richard Moore suggests that poetic form, by focusing the conscious mind on a difficult but meaningless task, leaves the subconscious mind free to express itself.

Jethro: In Exodus 18 Jethro urges Moses not to be the sole judge of the people: "You'll wear yourself out, and them too." Instead he urges him to "provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundred, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." The plan presented here, of course, assumes no Divinely appointed leader to choose the "gatherers"; instead they must be identified by the circles themselves.

"The great poem all poets have built up": from Shelley's "Defence of Poetry."

The estimate of one (potential) poet to one hundred individuals is, of course pure guesswork, but it was arrived at independently by this writer and by Richard Moore, whose "Poets" (in *Pygmies and Pyramids*) begins: "Scientists seldom are born, but the poets come one in a hundred." In an essay entitled "Preserving the Culture of the Word," I suggested that every large employer should employ one poet for each hundred workers!

"miracle at Philadelphia": title of Catherine Drinker Bowen's work on the drafting of the Constitution.

Yavneh: The academy at Yavneh (c. 200) compiled the Mishnah, thus solidifying the oral tradition that became the basis of Diaspora Judaism.

"...the hexagon/ can also be the shadow of a cube..." This is pointed out by Richard Moore. A saying by Kepler, cited by Celan in connection with "The Meridian": "God is symbolized by the sphere, man by the circle." The vision of the Hexagon first surfaced in a poem of that title that I thought of as a Utopian scherzo to the first version of this one (in my *Collected Poems*).

"And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight..." (Black Elk).

#### Chapter 14

"Let us begin with Law": The lines about the Law summarize the impressions of a three-year stint in law school, one product of which was an article, "Global Aspiration, Local Adjudication: A Context for the Extraterritorial Application of Environmental Law" (*Wisconsin*

*Environmental Law Journal*, Vol. 11, no. 2), which may be found in the "Poets' Law Institute" section of [www.pointandcircumference.com](http://www.pointandcircumference.com). In *Free Markets and Social Justice* and *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech*, Cass Sunstein points out that a) the democratic forum is not identical with the marketplace and b) the concept of free speech can be interpreted in a way that undermines democracy rather than supports it.

"...that best prayer for democracy..." "Confirm thy soul in self-control,/ Thy liberty in law." (Katherine Lee Bates)

"Commerce: ancient as the word" : The fact that commerce is a distinctive feature of human society was pointed out by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. However, David Graeber, in *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (which I learned of at the last minute and have not read) has argued that in the original, small human groups exchanges occurred through gifts which created obligations. The system of information-gathering proposed here might recreate the early conditions where gifts and obligations could be kept track of!

"get back into the saddle": "Things are in the saddle/ And ride mankind." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

"... lose the good of the intellect..." Vergil's phrase for all the inhabitants of Hell (Inf. V). For further reflections on computer technology, see my essay "I, Human," in *A Handbook of Macropoetics*.

"mercy to the cruel/ is cruelty to the merciful": "Those who are merciful to the cruel will end by being cruel to the merciful" (the Talmud).

"...then round the sacred circle of that nation...": The lines that follow reflect the thinking of Rabbi Dr. Zvi Faier.

## Chapter 15

"enacted on heart's field by night and day": here I was thinking of the Senoi tribe, who reportedly (I no longer recall where I read this) avert conflicts by displacing them into dream-life; see also Franz Grillparzer's play, *Der Traum ein Leben*. I would also like to mention a work that did not become known to me until after this chapter was composed, namely Ruth Pitter's "Six Dreams and a Vision," in her *Collected Poems*. As in the present work, Pitter's "Vision of Extreme Delight," of a "transparent earth," follows a vision of extinction ("May 1947"). Terrible as it is, the vision of extinction is evidently a necessary moment in the genesis of hope.

"They are appearing, may you behold" is a refrain of Black Elk's songs.

The idea that evolution is "pulled" from the future, as well as "pushed" from the past, is voiced by Hoyle in *The Intelligent Universe*. "...safe-conduct/through the turmoil..." Translates a line from Celan's poem "Denk dir (Just Think)."

We may perhaps give the last word in these Notes to Teilhard de Chardin, who writes, in *Human Energy*: "The evil in evil does not lie in the pain, but in the feeling of diminution by pain. The greatest suffering you can think of will disappear, or even dissolve in a kind



of pleasure, provided you can discover a correlatively proportionate achievement of which it has been the price. Hunger, thirst and wounds are unbearable in passivity or inaction. They no longer count, or do not exist, in the fever of an attack or a discovery. Let us think what will be sufficient, even in our present unorganized state, to compensate humanity for the anguish of its ills? Simply for consciousness to awake to an object born from its sufferings. The idea of a personalization of the universe will bring that faith and that hope." ("Sketch of a Personalistic Universe")

