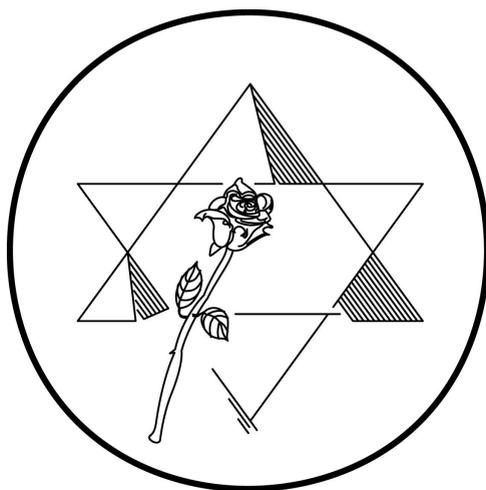


THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF EARTH



Esther Cameron
writing as George Richter

Collected Works Volume I

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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*.¹ 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.

¹ “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 2014,¹ 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.

¹ 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 30
lest they rebel against the resolution
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
along the edges for the trees to die 280
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.

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 780
that's in control, churning out stimuli

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."

800

The pointing arm

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
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
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.
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

810
820
830

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 1180
calls at last to extinction, and it comes.

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.

From the accountable hazard of their motion 110
 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, 510
whereby that which was whole in light became
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
as though arranged by larger destiny 20
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 finds 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 370
with joy in our existence and complete
solicitude for all we might require.

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, 380

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 390
deepened in adult man, parent and partner
with woman drawn into that careful circle,
providing and ordaining to preserve it.

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 400
of parent, when in weariness it rises

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.

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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 640
an answer from within: "Concede the harm
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,
which generations of the sages strove 850
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
marriage, as reuniting the two halves 860
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
be not held sacred, life itself becomes 870
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.

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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 worser 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, 210
 and these possessions too as empty counters
 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, 220
 and without harm to freedom of discourse,
 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 230
 the doers, of whose deeds we wash our hands.
 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
apportionment of what technology 290
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 300
all humans to Circumferential Mind.

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 330
to the logic of the marketplace, whereby,
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, 730
as from the faces of those youthful heroes
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

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. 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 relating 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 10th 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) 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. 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")

