

IT'S ONLY NATURAL

I

When nature ruled the world by terror,
we were a puny race.
Small wonder we conceived the error
wind bewailed our case,
cast shepherd and shepherdess in verse and vase
and haunted home with fauns and talking
roots our footfalls set to squawking:
even that half-human cur,
our Caliban constrained to speak pentameter.

Just yesterday, when I was a child
on the lonely road from Pitt
to Torr, pursuit of classics piled
in the lit farmhouse kitchen
couldn't charm with civilizing wit
the brute beyond the curtilage, past
sweet laurel drifted through the last
of our sugar trees before a vast
hardwood stretching like the question never asked.

Big cats on the abrupt hills
paced the hard path;
From cozy walls in the hollow's stillness,
burst the viper's wrath.
Old Man Fredsall sledged to town with stacks
of children for a graveyard roadside,
stood in our door til one more load died.
And from our house for all their days
the Seelyes met the stone-cold gaze
of the round pond, deeper than wide,
where their small son, Ethan, slipped and died;
slipped in the dark tarn and drowned in the black, black, blackness.

II

And we, the dull-eyed, vacant seed
scrambled away as urgently
as turtles newly hatched must,
beating to the sea.
Spring permits belief in freedom
now that the roads are clear
and the dead can be buried. Let us flee

with automatic speed
from the quickening land that will have us:
from those who lie blinded by the land,
tucked under flowered quilts: from hand
of Fredsall, five miles down
and as many up our hill
over and over with all his chil-
dren, and never mind until
they were frozen logs on the ground:
from Missus Seelye's memory,
who milked her cows and worked our piece
until the hour she died from
cancer. Just that time,
for once she owned to a foolish pain
and had herself a lie-down.

III

Traveling light in the city of,
by, and for
the people, I'd perfect blooms above
a concrete soil, cracked from shores
of finding, not the past's dense floors
of tearing thickets hung with white,
appallingly lovely spiders.

"Nature can suck out the soul through an eye
or an ear; stay
inside your head," chirped the raptor, high
over quarry. But, "Every kind will pay
the price of its strength," twin fox heads say,
eyes bright with hate over back of pew
in clever church, "J'accuse."

The shadow of wings discerned, grim twins,
foreboding and
remorse, recall us to our sins.
We've slaughtered all the lions and
their symmetry and leveled the land,
built over our hill and stopped the view
with smut. Places we knew
live on in the mind only, stand
like the dead stars that guide by their true
light. I hail from the Land of Cary. Who are you?

IV

The earth we spoiled will cleanse herself and heal,
purged of the Masterful Ape. Too smart to feel,
too clever to say true, too able to refrain,
we lose by winning. Worship Her whose reign
only the meek inherit; leave the plain
where cranes of black gold genuflect to Mammon, steal
to land's end where the lighthouse' metric peal
tolls battles of the sun and moon, and kneel
where breath of cold, salt floods can quench a hectic brain
and bless with sacraments withheld the strain
of my simple, man-made girl's possessed refrain,
her dear, demented voice singing, singing in the night.