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INFERNO PRESS • WILLIAM J. MARGOLIS

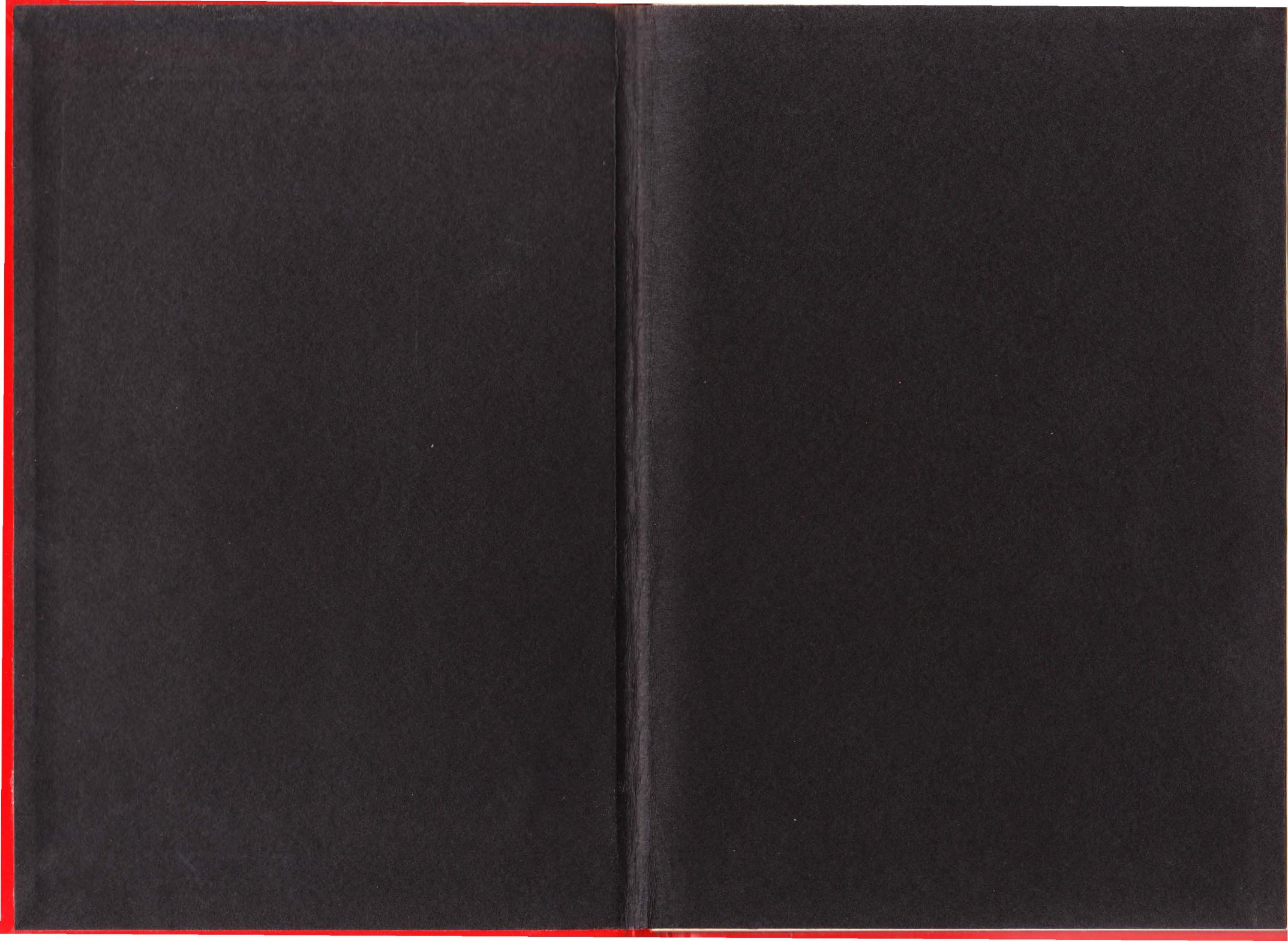
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# THE ANTEROOM OF HELL

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**THE**  
**ANTEROOM**  
**OF**  
**HELL**

**WILLIAM J. MARGOLIS**

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Several of these poems first appeared in  
'Embryo,' 'Ore,' 'Whetstone,' 'The Miscel-  
laneous Man,' 'danse macabre.'

for Marian



**INFERNO PRESS**  
**Box 5030 San Francisco, California**

↓ I AM A CHILD

I do not often speak  
for I had rather  
be seen than heard

But the time has come—  
though seen  
my presence isn't felt

in the press and mesh  
of Weltanschauung  
of welter-wars  
and Heavy waters.

I am a child  
and my wants are simple:

Though born of the sea  
I want to walk the land  
and stand upright, unfettered

Though my eyes are newly opened  
I want to see  
where I choose to look, unshuttered

Though I am born of pain  
let me know there was also love  
for I despair of despair  
and long to know  
unimpeded by abstraction

And though my needs are simple  
I am born without ability  
—let me learn  
for I have capability

Let me learn  
for I have doubts of your wisdom  
and there are old errors  
needing new corrections

Let me live  
for I am a child.

## ↓ IN MY OWN (VIRTUAL) IMAGE

The gentle pain of breathing  
is one luxury I've never permitted  
myself. My life & lines  
begin with heaves, perhaps,  
begin with the heavy laugh  
reserved for the melancholy humor  
of my mornings' necromancy,  
that transmutes light dreams  
to the sight of my own shadow  
cast by a winter sun.

The sweet sorrow of the delicate bloom  
and its relation to the *deja vu* of cloudfaces  
is one beautifully painful analysis  
of the text my plastic tower has denied me.  
My laugh & the thoroughfares between  
my page & pocket are grey;  
I have known the one through many  
dried and shriveled petals,  
shaken off in the anger  
of my own ill winds, and the other one  
I have no doubts at all of having seen  
before, and after every  
necromantic morning shadow.

It is the bitter joy of learning I was right  
when I thought a piece of the sky had fallen on me;  
it is the overpowering health I felt in my nerves  
when I saw my executioner accept my application;  
it is the sharp shadow imbedded in a Hiroshima bridge,  
it is the searing flash which transmuted him from life to  
line

from light to shade; or the fear which comes  
when one knows one has never been *here* before.  
My image is carved from my own stainless steel bowels  
and the only gentle, fragile thing is my knife.

↓ **AS SOON NOT**

As soon crack the stem of lotus,  
send uncloistered bud to die in pond  
yet never stir the humid water-bug complacency,  
as clip umbilicus of comatose conformity —

As soon pluck the petal of book-pressed rose  
and send the dusty corpse of an instant  
like fertilizer to the sterile study floor  
as prick the conscience of ubiquitous critic —

As soon flick the cooling ashes of my soul  
into the blind eyes of masses scuffling  
for the pose of greatness in the oracular readymade  
as sip torrential flow of wonderbound delight —

As soon bequeath the quick beneath my nail to death  
as meet the hail of truth with parasol and minted breath.

## ↓ A WORD IS BUT A FINGER POINTING

Come now!

A word is not a wagon  
carting feeling from a mouth to ear,  
not a van or vessel  
making transfer of experience from pen to eye.

A word is but a finger  
I point to show you where I've felt  
and when I've known.

I cannot give you straight  
the mystic knowledge of my rose  
nor the instant glimpse of lotus -

I can only set the arrow on the post  
directing you toward paths I've trod  
inviting you to rest in some green hour  
somewhat like the ones I've heard;

or, find a path yourself  
by starting off from where I stand  
and view the world and lotus wheel.

A word is not a wagon  
but a finger pointing.

## ↓ THE GROPING SAINT

To unsheathe the broken flimmetry  
of undigested cross-pollinations  
is the very duty of the saint.  
His life must always grieve  
the waxworks king,  
confuse the master  
of all snobbery.

To rebreathe the floating bribery  
of every new disgusting weathercock  
may cull the merry booty from the thief,  
but death will never give reprieve  
to any waxworks king confused  
between his flabby mastery  
and any manacle,  
any grassroot who is lost  
between false bottom and explosive ceilings  
yet groping.

↓ **UPON A FRIEND'S BEING FOUND  
CRIMINALLY SANE**

*for Vern Davidson —*

*an imprisoned conscientious objector to war*

Night becomes a time hexed eon  
in this fanfarewell abyss,  
a lingering reminder that we  
whose wits are not yet leashed  
must not forget the cliffs  
we live and grope among  
nor forsake the search  
for climbing, scaling art.

Night comes only once in the next eon  
of your muffled heart,  
an eon night of forced debility;  
and we, who yet may pick the crag  
we scabble at unfettered,  
must not accept with valley meekness  
the seeming inaccessibility  
of clouded chartless pinnacles.

Night comes but once in this vexed eon,  
an eternity of determined neglect,  
perfected termination of mind in flight.

We, who through no virtue of our own remain,  
will not be free of any fetter, bar;  
nor part of any better dream  
so long as we allow the valley minds  
make sport with mountain in the bitter pit.



## ↓ I WOULD NOT WEEP

I would not weep  
for tomorrow and the lion  
nor quail at the thought of good  
were it not for the lacunae incunabular  
and my poisoned sense of nocturne light.

I would not sleep  
between the woolen cleats and prayers  
nor flail in my coat of belts  
were it not for the fullness of my dust  
and my personal sense of inopportune right.

I would not keep  
wide trusts in the lamb and the dove  
nor scale the heights of Christ  
were it not for the intuitive balance  
and my precocious sense of untoward might.

## ↓ MOILED. THE SIMPLE WORLD ENMESHED

Moiled. The simple world enmeshed, I,  
gnashing from gut to recompense  
find little to sneer at  
longing as I am for never before  
but unlikely to come.

Wounds, beneath overt unction;  
leaks, in my only pump of existence;  
snares outweighed, yet not overcome  
find me lurching, an unsure target:  
first fleeting in sumptuous thwartings  
then supine with backward looks  
and freshly painted sorrows.

My selfspun web is far reaching,  
a wonder of glutinous complexity;  
but it wins no love.  
Not even my own.

## ↓ AFTER ALMOST LIVING

after fleeting iridescent glimpses  
veiled by somber mourning shrouds  
that I, or she, or the world wears

after barely brushing contact  
kept from meaningful embrace  
by the shell in which I, or she, or the world hides

after almost hearing the elliptical music  
hushed beyond the sound proof lining  
of the cell in which I, or she, or the world exists

after almost living  
I am crushed beneath the sordid roof  
of the incommunicative catacomb  
of misdirection and indifference  
which I, or she, or the world has dug

## ↓ THE INTENSE ADDICTION TO LOVE

The intense addiction to love  
seems an easy panacea  
resulting, as it does  
in utopic rushes  
to the flashing gates  
of cunningly contrived oases  
in this crossword-puzzle eros land,

oases simulating Eden  
as it might have been  
without its pregnant fruit  
of necessary mastery  
and mysterious self-sufficiency.

But withdrawal symptoms  
include the common nausea  
of self-depletion, indecisive tremors,  
and the bottomless blue-black bottle  
fly-specked with self-recriminations  
and containing the washable funk  
of outward-blind self-pity.

## ↓ ON PSEUDO-PATRIARCHY

Since, as we were taught  
the rights of man, reclining  
on the suffraged coca-cola breast,

as we imbibed  
the clobbered reason  
and sucked the sense of treason  
in being, at the iridium plated tit,

it is not strange  
that we have never looked  
beyond the satisfying ochered fluid  
so covert-arbitrarily and easily withheld,

nor asked ourselves  
the modus of our motivations,  
thinking they've been couched in kindness,

not realizing that they're merely  
post-hypnotic matriarchal orders  
hidden deep in self-respect,

illusions broadcast solidly  
through the scarified ranks  
of mothers' suckled sons

for the preservation  
of the race of  
Woman.

## ↓ THE WIZARD OF BABYLON

I haven't played with dolls for years  
— not since I was three  
and bashed its head  
then cried

But frequently I have read  
of others' wizardry  
and so tonight I've fashioned  
what is only in my mind  
your life-like image  
— though the single hair  
that powers it  
is one of yours  
and the gold band I've placed  
on its left hand finger, third  
is leaf of wedding picture frame

I have also fashioned  
a clumsy image of myself  
— the part is equal  
to the whole —  
containing salt of my dried tears  
now no longer shed  
with this omnipotent magic  
active in my heart

I begin to feel already  
our passionate embrace

I wonder —  
can these dolls  
effectively erase  
a past of non-communication  
or is a future reciprocity  
too much for even magic  
with our all too human  
lack of grace

I begin to feel already  
the passing of our race

## ↓ A STAB IN THE HEART OF REGENESIS

When never is the holy place  
and nowhere is the spirit bound  
I know the feeling of the tortured mouse  
and the gravely wail of mind.

You can't convince me of the past  
nor effervesce a genii to my soul;  
I'm lonely bound and self enchained  
and water drop weary with my bile.

I can't give you the bottom of my pail,  
I can't give you my starry roof;  
but I'll try to fill your never  
and find your nowhere near my own;

I'll make you present in the wonder-bind toil  
and shake the world with my pulling leaf  
till the bottle-borne liquid of my fluid year  
falls down like the Flood of a kinder time,  
a day before Adam. . . .

## ↓ IT IS NOT THAT I HAVE NOTHING

It is not that I have nothing to say  
I have no words to say it

—words that have not  
been encrusted thickly  
with barnacled meaning  
of a sinking culture

—words that have not  
been thickly uttered  
by the tinsel symbols  
of our childish dreams

—words that have not  
the slightest whisper left  
of you and me, of us.

It is not that I have nothing to say:  
We have meaning and being  
deprived of symbol.

There is nothing left but life.

## ↓ MARRIAGE

They stood before the shallow pit  
containing books of wisdom:  
a Life of Gandhi  
a book of Zen  
Einstein's Relativity  
a dozen others, in a row  
containing ikons, paintings:  
Titian, Rembrandt, Vermeer  
de Chirico, Picasso, Klee  
containing music scrolls and disks:  
ancient chants and lays, dirges  
Beethoven, Prokofief, and jazz

Beneath their feet reposed  
the verbalistic, the symbolic, imagistic  
in deathly silent clamor of shouting sign  
in attendance on the man, the woman.

The man, the woman  
the two, become one  
without benefit  
of linguistic clergy  
or semantic pomp.

↓ **ON WAKING FROM A DREAM  
OF SUBLIMATION**

Had not the magic lifted. . .  
Had I lulled myself again,  
back into my dreary, seried slumber vision. . .

Had the owl winked just one more tempting time —  
I should have floated  
with only feathered feeling,  
pillow muffled hearing,  
lust mote misted seeing,  
till the very fringe and lining of my dusty life  
were mingled with the past in belted,  
buckled jacket, totally disnuded  
of its growing, knowing,  
wakeful ecstasy.

This, I should warn you, is no lament,  
for I know both magic black, and white.  
The latter is the conscious matter,  
without attenuation, nor the quick forgetfulness  
of black summer cloud or shattered hate.

In blackness there is that trapping transience  
that knows no letting loose  
of stray ends of liminal awareness.

It is the simulacrum of beauty,  
the virtual image of reality.

Had not the magic of illusion lifted  
I could not have praised you  
with my growing, knowing art.

## ↓ ANTIQUE GAME OUTGROWN

Tonight I walked nine-thousand toe-heel steps  
and tried to penance three deep inner brooding's wrongs.

Elbow, tiptoe, mumbleypeg hopscotch,  
Winter's coming and I can't play long.

Tonight I knelt at forewarned cunning's scheming  
and learned that Lilith's candle burned before me,  
had my heart stop five holy minutes just to cool  
constricted passion,  
keep my flair from burning unapproached bridges not  
yet built.

Tonight I marched nine-thousand heel-toe paces  
and tried assuaging pique at three-pronged splintered  
brooding.

Elbow, tiptoe, mumbleypeg hopscotch,  
Winter's coming and I can't play long.

Tonight I felt the forearmed dreaming stiffness  
and tried refusing smitten graces forced upon me  
unconsented,  
had my face obverted for me to receive the bitten fist,  
to shape my dares to learning unaccounted syntheses  
unabridged.

Tonight I sang nine-thousand tooth-tongue graces  
and cried in penance for my three unbrooded, full-  
grown longings.

Elbow, tiptoe, mumbleypeg hopscotch,  
Winter's coming and I can't play long.

Tonight I hanged from nine-thousand toe-trod, heel-  
kissed laces  
and pried my eyes back out of evil brooding, three-  
deep cists.

Elbow, tiptoe, mumbleypeg hopscotch,  
Winter's gone; nub-toed, toothless; play is wrong.

## ↓ JUDGEMENT DAY

I could remember *my* name. But everybody else was taking all their clothes off, and how is one to think of anything but literal realities when faced with such abstraction. What I felt was something like being in bed with two pairs of scissors. It was cheap and mean. And then all the clippings, nail parings, excretions and other effluvia march in on paper-clips and restore themselves, one on the other, crowding, until even I began to wonder if it *was* my name.

But of course. It had to be me. Who else could I be? It had to be me. I remember very clearly being introduced on a very cold day, on the corner of Dearborn and State streets in Chicago some years ago, and it was me, of course. But times have changed. One is sometimes mistaken when it comes to old memories. The folds of one's brain get cramped, perhaps; and yawn or stretch, and poof. . . but I *could* remember my name, I should think.

## ↓ IN THE NECROMANTIC ANTEROOM OF HELL

In the anteroom of necromantic hell  
I pause, remembering the view of everything  
behind my head, silent now as I approach these silent  
stairs.

I turn one final time from my unmarked path  
that surely leads to one more final chasm, one more  
cliff face,  
and look into my own, my afterimage race that follows  
me and is my soul.

You are beautiful, my night,  
in your own sequestered way,  
and the hand that fingers pearls  
at your dawn-light fluted throat  
is too ecstatically ephemeral  
for even gallantry in farewells.

I cannot fling aside the petals  
of the lotus, and the rose,  
both strewn before me by that hand,  
both formed and designated  
long before I walked this path —  
How shall I make my way  
when to stay is not to crush —  
But I must pass, and be remembered,

release the fragrance, and be lost.

We do not recall each blade of grass  
that bent beneath us, nor the grains  
that briefly flashed, like breakers,  
as we chased a momentary decade  
in each other's glance or pirouette.

We faltered then, but entwined as lovers go,  
each guided, followed, found the way,  
discovered entrechat; and lost, dejected,  
huddled in the forest until a falling leaf  
passed through the one stray lance of light  
that lit your auburn hair and reflected in my eye.

They will never know, the straw men,  
the tilting giants with their wagging fingers,  
they will never have an instant glimpse.  
They will never be.

In this anteroom of hell I disengage my vision,  
having paused, reflected, and now, with nothing more  
to contemplate,  
I ascend the corridor flight and surreptitiously drop a  
crimson piece of silk.