

**Adam Phillips — The Poet's Essay**

**Seminar 1: 'A Poem Is a Walk'**

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## A Poem Is a Walk

*Nothing that can be said  
in words is worth saying.*

—Lao-tse

I don't know whether I can sustain myself for thirty minutes of saying I know nothing—or that I need to try, since I might prove no more than you already suspect, or, even worse, persuade you of the fact. Nothingness contains no images to focus and brighten the mind, no contraries to build up muscular tension: it has no place for argumentation and persuasion, comparison and contrast, classification, analysis. As nothingness is more perfectly realized, there is increasingly less (if that isn't contradictory) to realize, less to say, less need to say. Only silence perfects silence. Only nothingness contributes to nothingness. The only perfect paper I could give you would be by standing silent before you for thirty minutes. But I am going to try this imperfect, wordy means to suggest why silence is finally the only perfect statement.

I have gone in for the large scope with no intention but to make it larger; so I have had to leave a lot of space “unworked,” have had to leave out points the definition of any one of which could occupy a paper longer than this. For though we often need to be restored to the small, concrete, limited, and certain, we as often need to be reminded of the large, vague, unlimited, unknown.

I can't tell you where a poem comes from, what it is, or

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From *Epoch* 18 (Fall 1968): 114–19. Delivered to the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh in April 1967.

what it is for: nor can any other man. The reason I can't tell you is that the purpose of a poem is to go past telling, to be recognized by burning.

I don't, though, disparage efforts to say what poetry is and is for. I am grateful for—though I can't keep up with—the flood of articles, theses, and textbooks that mean to share insight concerning the nature of poetry. Probably all the attention to poetry results in some value, though the attention is more often directed to lesser than to greater values.

Once every five hundred years or so, a summary statement about poetry comes along that we can't imagine ourselves living without. The greatest statement in our language is Coleridge's in the *Biographia*. It serves my purpose to quote only a fragment from the central statement: that the imagination—and, I think, poetry—“reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.” This suggests to me that description, logic, and hypothesis, reaching toward higher and higher levels of generality, come finally to an antithesis logic can't bridge. But poetry, the imagination, can create a vehicle, at once concrete and universal, one and many, similar and diverse, that is capable of bridging the duality and of bringing us the experience of a “real” world that is also a reconciled, a unified, real world. And this vehicle is the only expression of language, of words, that I know of that contradicts my quotation from Lao-tse, because a poem becomes, like reality, an existence about which nothing that can be said in words is worth saying.

Statement can also achieve unity, though without the internal suspension of variety. For example, All is One, seems to encompass or erase all contradiction. A statement, however, differs from a work of art. The statement, All is One, provides us no experience of manyness, of the concrete world from which the statement derived. But a work of art creates a world of both one and many, a world of definition and indefinability. Why should we be surprised that the work of art, which overreaches and reconciles logical paradox, is inaccessible to the methods of logical exposition? A world comes into being about which any statement, however revelatory, is a lessening.

Knowledge of poetry, which is gained, as in science or other



areas, by induction and deduction, is likely to remain provisional by falling short in one of two ways: either it is too specific, too narrow and definite, to be widely applicable—that is, the principles suggested by a single poem are not likely to apply in the same number or kind in another poem: or, the knowledge is too general, too abstract and speculative, to fit precisely the potentialities of any given poem. Each poem in becoming generates the laws by which it is generated: extensions of the laws to other poems never completely take. But a poem generated by its own laws may be unrealized and bad in terms of so-called objective principles of taste, judgment, deduction. We are obliged both to begin internally with a given poem and work toward generalization *and* to approach the poem externally to test it with a set—and never quite the same set—of a priori generalizations. Whatever we gain in terms of the existence of an individual poem, we lose in terms of a consistent generality, a tradition: and vice versa. It is Scylla and Charybdis again. It is the logically insoluble problem of one and many.

To avoid the uncertainty generated by this logical impasse—and to feel assured of something definite to teach—we are likely to prefer one side or the other—either the individual poem or the set of generalizations—and then to raise mere preference to eternal verity. But finally, nothing is to be gained by dividing the problem. A teacher once told me that every line of verse ought to begin with a capital letter. That is definite, teachable, mistaken knowledge. Only by accepting the uncertainty of the whole can we free ourselves to the reconciliation that is the poem, both at the subconscious level of feeling and the conscious level of art.

One step further before we get to the main business of the paper. Questions structure and, so, to some extent predetermine answers. If we ask a vague question, such as, What is poetry? we expect a vague answer, such as, Poetry is the music of words, or Poetry is the linguistic correction of disorder. If we ask a narrower question, such as, What is a conceit? we are likely to get a host of answers, but narrower answers. Proteus is a good figure for this. You remember that Proteus was a minor sea god, a god of *knowledge*, an attendant on Poseidon.

Poseidon is the ocean, the total view, every structure in the ocean as well as the unstructured ocean itself. Proteus, the god of knowledge, though, is a minor god. Definite knowledge, knowledge specific and clear enough to be recognizable as knowledge, is, as we have seen, already limited into a minor view. Burke said that a clear idea is another name for a little idea. It was presumed that Proteus knew the answers—and more important The Answer—but he resisted questions by transforming himself from one creature or substance into another. The more specific, the more binding the question, the more vigorously he wrestled to be free of it. Specific questions about poetry merely turn into other specific questions about poetry. But the vague question is answered by the ocean which provides distinction and nondistinction, something intellect can grasp, compare, and structure, and something it can neither grasp, compare, nor structure.

My predisposition, which I hope shortly to justify, is to prefer confusion to oversimplified clarity, meaninglessness to neat, precise meaning, uselessness to overdirected usefulness. I do not believe that rationality can exhaust the poem, that any scheme of explanation can adequately reflect the poem, that any invented structure of symbology can exceed and thereby replace the poem.

I must stress here the point that I appreciate clarity, order, meaning, structure, rationality: they are necessary to whatever provisional stability we have, and they can be the agents of gradual and successful change. And the rational, critical mind is essential to making poems: it protects the real poem (which is nonrational) from blunders, misconceptions, incompetences; it weeds out the second rate. Definition, rationality, and structure are ways of seeing, but they become prisons when they blank out other ways of seeing. If we remain open-minded we will soon find for any easy clarity an equal and opposite, so that the sum of our clarities should return us where we belong, to confusion and, hopefully, to more complicated and better assessments.

Unlike the logical structure, the poem is an existence which can incorporate contradictions, inconsistencies, explanations and counter-explanations and still remain whole, unexhausted



and inexhaustible; an existence that comes about by means other than those of description and exposition and, therefore, to be met by means other than, or in addition to, those of description and exposition.

With the hope of focusing some of these problems, I want now to establish a reasonably secure identity between a poem and a walk and to ask how a walk occurs, what it is, and what it is for. I say I want a reasonably secure identity because I expect to have space to explore only four resemblances between poems and walks and no space at all for the differences, taking it for granted that walks and poems are different things. I'm not, of course, interested in walks as such but in clarification or intensification by distraction, seeing one thing better by looking at something else. We want to see the poem.

What justification is there for comparing a poem with a walk rather than with something else? I take the walk to be the externalization of an interior seeking, so that the analogy is first of all between the external and the internal. Poets not only do a lot of walking but talk about it in their poems: "I wandered lonely as a cloud," "Now I out walking," and "Out walking in the frozen swamp one grey day." There are countless examples, and many of them suggest that both the real and the fictive walk are externalizations of an inward seeking. The walk magnified is the journey, and probably no figure has been used more often than the journey for both the structure and concern of an interior seeking.

How does a poem resemble a walk? First, each makes use of the whole body, involvement is total, both mind and body. You can't take a walk without feet and legs, without a circulatory system, a guidance and coordinating system, without eyes, ears, desire, will, need: the total person. This observation is important not only for what it includes but for what it rules out: as with a walk, a poem is not simply a mental activity: it has body, rhythm, feeling, sound, and mind, conscious and subconscious. The pace at which a poet walks (and thinks), his natural breath-length, the line he pursues, whether forthright and straight or weaving and meditative, his whole "air," whether of aimlessness or purpose—all these things and many more figure into the "physiology" of the poem he writes.

A second resemblance is that every walk is unreproducible, as is every poem. Even if you walk exactly the same route each time—as with a sonnet—the events along the route cannot be imagined to be the same from day to day, as the poet's health, sight, his anticipations, moods, fears, thoughts cannot be the same. There are no two identical sonnets or villanelles. If there were, we would not know how to keep the extra one: it would have no separate existence. If a poem is each time new, then it is necessarily an act of discovery, a chance taken, a chance that may lead to fulfillment or disaster. The poet exposes himself to the risk. All that has been said about poetry, all that he has learned about poetry, is only a partial assurance.

The third resemblance between a poem and a walk is that each turns, one or more times, and eventually *returns*. It's conceivable that a poem could take out and go through incident after incident without ever returning, merely ending in the poet's return to dust. But most poems and most walks return. I have already quoted the first line from Frost's "The Wood-Pile." Now, here are the first three lines:

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,  
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.  
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see.'

The poet is moving outward seeking the point from which he will turn back. In "The Wood-Pile" there is no return: return is implied. The poet goes farther and farther into the swamp until he finds by accident the point of illumination with which he closes the poem.

But the turns and returns or implied returns give shape to the walk and to the poem. With the first step, the number of shapes the walk might take is infinite, but then the walk begins to "define" itself as it goes along, though freedom remains total with each step: any tempting side road can be turned into on impulse, or any wild patch of woods can be explored. The pattern of the walk is to come true, is to be recognized, discovered. The pattern, when discovered, may be found to apply to the whole walk, or only a segment of the walk may prove to have contour and therefore suggestion and shape.



From previous knowledge of the terrain, inner and outer, the poet may have before the walk an inkling of a possible contour. Taking the walk would then be searching out or confirming, giving actuality to, a previous intuition.

The fourth resemblance has to do with the motion common to poems and walks. The motion may be lumbering, clipped, wavering, tripping, mechanical, dance-like, awkward, staggering, slow, etc. But the motion occurs only in the body of the walker or in the body of the words. It can't be extracted and contemplated. It is nonreproducible and nonlogical. It can't be translated into another body. There is only one way to know it and that is to enter into it.

To summarize, a walk involves the whole person; it is not reproducible: its shape occurs, unfolds: it has a motion characteristic of the walker.

If you were brought into a classroom and asked to teach walks, what would you teach? If you have any idea, I hope the following suggestions will deprive you of it.

The first thought that would occur to you is, What have other people said about walks? You could collect all historical references to walks and all descriptions of walks, find out the average length of walks, through what kind of terrain they have most often proceeded, what kind of people have enjoyed walks and why, and how walks have reflected the societies in which they occurred. In short, you could write a history of walks.

Or you could call in specialists. You might find a description of a particularly disturbing or interesting walk and then you might call in a botanist to retrace that walk with you and identify all the leaves and berries for you: or you might take along a sociologist to point out to you that the olive trees mentioned were at the root—forgive me—of feudal society: or you might take along a surveyor to give you a close reading in inches and degrees: or you might take a psychoanalyst along to ask good questions about what is the matter with people who take walks: or you might take a physiologist to provide you with astonishment that people can walk at all. Each specialist would no doubt come up with important facts and insights, but your attention, focused on

the cell structure of the olive leaf, would miss the main event, the walk itself.

You could ask what walks are good for. Here you would find plenty: to settle the nerves, to improve the circulation, to break in a new pair of shoes, to exercise the muscles, to aid digestion, to prevent heart attacks, to focus the mind, to distract the mind, to get a loaf of bread, to watch birds, to kick stones, to spy on a neighbor's wife, to dream. My point is clear. You could go on indefinitely. Out of desperation and exasperation brought on by the failure to define the central use or to exhaust the list of uses of walks, you would surrender, only to recover into victory by saying, Walks are useless. So are poems.

Or you could find out what walks mean: do they mean a lot of men have unbearable wives, or that we must by outward and inward motions rehearse the expansion, and contraction of the universe; do walks mean that we need structure—or, at an obsessive level, ritual in our lives? The answer is that a walk doesn't mean anything, which is a way of saying that to some extent it means anything you can make it mean—and always more than you can make it mean. Walks are meaningless. So are poems.

There is no ideal walk, then, though I haven't taken the time to prove it out completely, except the useless, meaningless walk. Only uselessness is empty enough for the presence of so many uses, and only through uselessness can the ideal walk come into the sum total of its uses. Only uselessness can allow the walk to be totally itself.

I hope you are now, if you were not before, ready to agree with me that the greatest wrong that can be done a poem is to substitute a known part for an unknown whole and that the choice to be made is the freedom of nothingness: that our experience of poetry is least injured when we accept it as useless, meaningless, and nonrational.

Besides the actual reading in class of many poems, I would suggest you do two things: first, while teaching everything you can and keeping free of it, teach that poetry is a mode of discourse that differs from logical exposition. It is the mode I spoke of earlier than can reconcile opposites into a "real" world both concrete and universal. Teach that. Teach the distinction.

Second, I would suggest you teach that poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed. Having once experienced the mystery, plenitude, contradiction, and composure of a work of art, we afterward have a built-in resistance to the slogans and propaganda of oversimplification that have often contributed to the destruction of human life. Poetry is a verbal means to a nonverbal source. It is a motion to no-motion, to the still point of contemplation and deep realization. Its knowledges are all negative and, therefore, more positive than any knowledge. Nothing that can be said about it in words is worth saying.



# Robert Frost

## *A Late Walk*

When I go up through the mowing field,  
The headless aftermath,  
Smooth-laid like thatch with the heavy dew,  
Half closes the garden path.

And when I come to the garden ground,  
The whirl of sober birds  
Up from the tangle of withered weeds  
Is sadder than any words.

A tree beside the wall stands bare,  
But a leaf that lingered brown,  
Disturbed, I doubt not, by my thought,  
Comes softly rattling down.

I end not far from my going forth  
By picking the faded blue  
Of the last remaining aster flower  
To carry again to you.

## *The Wood-Pile*

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,  
I paused and said, 'I will turn back from here.  
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see.'  
The hard snow held me, save where now and then  
One foot went through. The view was all in lines  
Straight up and down of tall slim trees  
Too much alike to mark or name a place by  
So as to say for certain I was here  
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.  
A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
And say no word to tell me who he was  
Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.

He thought that I was after him for a feather—  
The white one in his tail; like one who takes  
Everything said as personal to himself.  
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.  
And then there was a pile of wood for which  
I forgot him and let his little fear  
Carry him off the way I might have gone,  
Without so much as wishing him good-night.  
He went behind it to make his last stand.  
It was a cord of maple, cut and split  
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.  
And not another like it could I see.  
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.  
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,  
Or even last year's or the year's before.  
The wood was gray and the bark warping off it  
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis  
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.  
What held it though on one side was a tree  
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,  
These latter about to fall. I thought that only  
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks  
Could so forget his handiwork on which  
He spent himself, the labor of his ax,  
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace  
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could  
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

A. R. Ammons

## Corsons Inlet

I went for a walk over the dunes again this morning  
to the sea,  
then turned right along  
the surf

rounded a naked headland  
and returned

along the inlet shore:

it was muggy sunny, the wind from the sea steady and high,  
crisp in the running sand,  
some breakthroughs of sun  
but after a bit

continuous overcast:

the walk liberating, I was released from forms,  
from the perpendiculars,  
straight lines, blocks, boxes, binds  
of thought  
into the hues, shadings, rises, flowing bends and blends  
of sight:

I allow myself eddies of meaning:  
yield to a direction of significance  
running  
like a stream through the geography of my work:  
you can find  
in my sayings

swerves of action  
like the inlet's cutting edge:  
there are dunes of motion,  
organizations of grass, white sandy paths of remembrance  
in the overall wandering of mirroring mind:



but Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events  
I cannot draw, the ledger I cannot keep, the accounting  
beyond the account:

in nature there are few sharp lines: there are areas of  
primrose  
    more or less dispersed;  
disorderly orders of bayberry; between the rows  
of dunes,  
irregular swamps of reeds,  
though not reeds alone, but grass, bayberry, yarrow, all . . .  
predominantly reeds:

I have reached no conclusions, have erected no boundaries,  
shutting out and shutting in, separating inside  
    from outside: I have  
    drawn no lines:  
    as

manifold events of sand  
change the dune's shape that will not be the same shape  
tomorrow,

so I am willing to go along, to accept  
the becoming  
thought, to stake off no beginnings or ends, establish  
    no walls:

by transitions the land falls from grassy dunes to creek  
to undercreek: but there are no lines, though  
    change in that transition is clear  
    as any sharpness: but "sharpness" spread out,  
allowed to occur over a wider range  
than mental lines can keep:

the moon was full last night: today, low tide was low:  
black shoals of mussels exposed to the risk  
of air  
and, earlier, of sun,

waved in and out with the waterline, waterline inexact,  
caught always in the event of change:

    a young mottled gull stood free on the shoals  
    and ate

to vomiting: another gull, squawking possession, cracked a crab,  
picked out the entrails, swallowed the soft-shelled legs, a ruddy  
turnstone running in to snatch leftover bits:

risk is full: every living thing in  
siege: the demand is life, to keep life: the small  
white blacklegged egret, how beautiful, quietly stalks and spears  
    the shallows, darts to shore  
        to stab—what? I couldn't  
see against the black mudflats—a frightened  
fiddler crab?

    the news to my left over the dunes and  
reeds and bayberry clumps was  
    fall: thousands of tree swallows  
    gathering for flight:  
    an order held  
    in constant change: a congregation  
rich with entropy: nevertheless, separable, noticeable  
    as one event,

    not chaos: preparations for  
flight from winter,  
cheet, cheet, cheet, cheet, wings rifling the green clumps,  
beaks

at the bayberries  
    a perception full of wind, flight, curve,  
    sound:  
    the possibility of rule as the sum of rulelessness:  
the "field" of action  
with moving, incalculable center:

in the smaller view, order tight with shape:  
blue tiny flowers on a leafless weed: carapace of crab:  
snail shell:

    pulsations of order

in the bellies of minnows: orders swallowed,  
broken down, transferred through membranes  
to strengthen larger orders: but in the large view, no  
lines or changeless shapes: the working in and out, together  
and against, of millions of events: this,

so that I make  
no form of  
formlessness:

orders as summaries, as outcomes of actions override  
or in some way result, not predictably (seeing me gain  
the top of a dune,  
the swallows  
could take flight—some other fields of bayberry  
could enter fall  
berryless) and there is serenity:

no arranged terror: no forcing of image, plan,  
or thought:  
no propaganda, no humbling of reality to precept:

terror pervades but is not arranged, all possibilities  
of escape open: no route shut, except in  
the sudden loss of all routes:

I see narrow orders, limited tightness, but will  
not run to that easy victory:  
still around the looser, wider forces work:  
I will try  
to fasten into order enlarging grasps of disorder, widening  
scope, but enjoying the freedom that  
Scope eludes my grasp, that there is no finality of vision,  
that I have perceived nothing completely,  
that tomorrow a new walk is a new walk.

## Saliences

Consistencies rise  
and ride  
the mind down  
hard routes  
walled  
with no outlet and so  
to open a variable geography,  
proliferate  
possibility, here  
is this dune fest  
releasing  
mind feeding out,  
gathering clusters,  
fields of order in disorder,  
where choice  
can make beginnings,  
turns,  
reversals,  
where straight line  
and air-hard thought  
can meet  
unarranged disorder,  
dissolve  
before the one event that  
creates present time  
in the multi-variable  
scope:  
a variable of wind  
among the dunes,  
making variables  
of position and direction and sound  
of every reed leaf



and bloom,  
 running streams of sand,  
 winding, rising, at a depression  
 falling out into deltas,  
 weathering shells with blast,  
 striking hiss into clumps of grass,  
 against bayberry leaves,  
     lifting  
 the spider from footing to footing  
 hard across the dry even crust  
 toward the surf:  
 wind, a variable, soft wind, hard  
 steady wind, wind  
 shaped and kept in the  
 bent of trees,  
 the prevailing dipping seaward  
 of reeds,  
 the kept and erased sandcrab trails:  
 wind, the variable to the gull's flight,  
 how and where he drops the clam  
 and the way he heads in, running to loft:  
 wind, from the sea, high surf  
 and cool weather;  
 from the land, a lessened breakage  
 and the land's heat:  
 wind alone as a variable,  
 as a factor in millions of events,  
 leaves no two moments  
 on the dunes the same:  
     keep  
 free to these events,  
 bend to these  
 changing weathers:  
 multiple as sand, events of sense  
 alter old dunes  
 of mind,  
 release new channels of flow,  
 free materials  
 to new forms:

wind alone as a variable  
 takes this neck of dunes  
 out of calculation's reach:  
 come out of the hard  
 routes and ruts,  
 pour over the walls  
 of previous assessments: turn to  
 the open,  
 the unexpected, to new saliences of feature.

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The reassurance is  
 that through change  
 continuities sinuously work,  
 cause and effect  
     without alarm,  
 gradual shadings out or in,  
 motions that full  
     with time  
 do not surprise, no  
 abrupt leap or burst: possibility,  
 with meaningful development  
 of circumstance:

when I went back to the dunes today,  
     saliences,  
 congruent to memory,  
 spread firmly across my sight:  
 the narrow white path  
 rose and dropped over  
 grassy rises toward the sea:  
 sheets of reeds,  
 tasseling now near fall,  
 filled the hollows  
 with shapes of ponds or lakes:  
 bayberry, darker, made wandering  
 chains of clumps, sometimes pouring  
 into heads, like stopped water:  
     much seemed

constant, to be looked  
forward to, expected:  
from the top of a dune rise,  
look of ocean salience: in  
    the hollow,  
where a runlet  
    makes in  
at full tide and fills a bowl,  
extravagance of pink periwinkle  
along the grassy edge,  
and a blue, bunchy weed, deep blue,  
deep into the mind the dark blue  
    constant:  
minnows left high in the tide-deserted pocket,  
    fiddler crabs  
bringing up gray pellets of drying sand,  
disappearing from air's faster events  
at any close approach:  
certain things and habits  
    recognizable as  
having lasted through the night:  
though what change in  
a day's doing!  
desertions of swallows  
    that yesterday  
ravaged air, bush, reed, attention  
in gatherings wide as this neck of dunes:  
now, not a sound  
or shadow, no trace of memory, no remnant  
    explanation:  
summations of permanence!  
where not a single single thing endures,  
the overall reassures,  
deaths and flights,  
shifts and sudden assaults claiming  
limited orders,  
the separate particles:  
earth brings to grief  
much in an hour that sang, leaped, swirled,  
yet keeps a round  
    quiet turning,  
beyond loss or gain,  
beyond concern for the separate reach.



## Easter Morning

I have a life that did not become,  
that turned aside and stopped,  
astonished:  
I hold it in me like a pregnancy or  
as on my lap a child  
not to grow or grow old but dwell on

it is to his grave I most  
frequently return and return  
to ask what is wrong, what was  
wrong, to see it all by  
the light of a different necessity  
but the grave will not heal  
and the child,  
stirring, must share my grave  
with me, an old man having  
gotten by on what was left

when I go back to my home country in these  
fresh far-away days, it's convenient to visit  
everybody, aunts and uncles, those who used to say,  
look how he's shooting up, and the  
trinket aunts who always had a little  
something in their pocketbooks, cinnamon bark  
or a penny or nickel, and uncles who  
were the rumored fathers of cousins  
who whispered of them as of great, if  
troubled, presences, and school  
teachers, just about everybody older  
(and some younger) collected in one place  
waiting, particularly, but not for  
me, mother and father there, too, and others  
close, close as burrowing  
under skin, all in the graveyard

assembled, done for, the world they  
used to wield, have trouble and joy  
in, gone

the child in me that could not become  
was not ready for others to go,  
to go on into change, blessings and  
horrors, but stands there by the road  
where the mishap occurred, crying out for  
help, come and fix this or we  
can't get by, but the great ones who  
were to return, they could not or did  
not hear and went on in a flurry and  
now, I say in the graveyard, here  
lies the flurry, now it can't come  
back with help or helpful asides, now  
we all buy the bitter  
incompletions, pick up the knots of  
horror, silently raving, and go on  
crashing into empty ends not  
completions, not rondures the fullness  
has come into and spent itself from  
I stand on the stump  
of a child, whether myself  
or my little brother who died, and  
yell as far as I can, I cannot leave this place, for  
for me it is the dearest and the worst,  
it is life nearest to life which is  
life lost: it is my place where  
I must stand and fail,  
calling attention with tears  
to the branches not lofting  
boughs into space, to the barren  
air that holds the world that was my world

though the incompletions  
(& completions) burn out  
standing in the flash high-burn  
momentary structure of ash, still it  
is a picture-book, letter-perfect  
Easter morning: I have been for a

walk: the wind is tranquil: the brook  
works without flashing in an abundant  
tranquility: the birds are lively with  
voice: I saw something I had  
never seen before: two great birds,  
maybe eagles, blackwinged, whitenecked  
and -headed, came from the south oaring  
the great wings steadily; they went  
directly over me, high up, and kept on  
due north: but then one bird,  
the one behind, veered a little to the  
left and the other bird kept on seeming  
not to notice for a minute: the first  
began to circle as if looking for  
something, coasting, resting its wings  
on the down side of some of the circles:  
the other bird came back and they both  
circled, looking perhaps for a draft;  
they turned a few more times, possibly  
rising—at least, clearly resting—  
then flew on falling into distance till  
they broke across the local bush and  
trees: it was a sight of bountiful  
majesty and integrity: the having  
patterns and routes, breaking  
from them to explore other patterns or  
better ways to routes, and then the  
return: a dance sacred as the sap in  
the trees, permanent in its descriptions  
as the ripples round the brook's  
ripplestone: fresh as this particular  
flood of burn breaking across us now  
from the sun.



## Motion

The word is  
 not the thing:  
 is  
 a construction of,  
 a tag for,  
 the thing: the  
 word in  
 no way  
 resembles  
 the thing, except  
 as sound  
 resembles,  
 as in *whirr*,  
 sound:  
 the relation  
 between what this  
 as words  
 is  
 and what is  
 is tenuous: we  
 agree upon  
 this as the net to  
 cast on what  
 is: the finger  
 to  
 point with: the  
 method of  
 distinguishing,  
 defining, limiting:  
 poems  
 are fingers, methods,  
 nets,  
 not what is or  
 was:  
 but the music  
 in poems  
 is different,  
 points to nothing,

traps no  
 realities, takes  
 no game, but  
 by the motion of  
 its motion  
 resembles  
 what, moving, is—  
 the wind  
 underleaf white against  
 the tree.