

VIEWING THE OCEAN
Long Beach, 1901

On the trolley that day—Grandmother told us—
His face, lined and enheartening, went white
Suddenly, as if seams opened and he sank,
When, beyond her bonnet, he first saw it—
Like all their farms and movings in a blur,
Steadfast, bluewhite, stretching unworkably far.

So perhaps it was some old promise to himself
(Made when the first cornfield he called theirs
Rasped with urgent tides, and a swarm of bees,
All in a sieve, set forth on a midsummer sail)
That drew her aside, discreetly, to a settee,
While—she continued—he went straight for it:

The seldom-spoken-of that, not unreal,
Was still so more immense than he had dreamed
That, of its little, may be fathomed much.
For, honestly, the ocean, vastly pleased
At starting another century quite unrulèd—
And lazily, if spasmodically, glancing up

Where a man was not just staring, but evidently
Feeling, whatever dazed him, to some depth
The give-and-take and heartlessness of being
In total charge of oneself even a minute—
Unexpectedly gave this flabbergasted lurch;
And, lifting on mighty roots a surging dance

That mooed and baaed and neighed a thousandfold
(While, skipping here and there, forgetfully
Shocking itself like wheat with upcurled arms),
Combed its alum joys till endless furrows
Rolled as smooth as honey to the feet of that seer
For the full hour he stood there, hat in hand.