

UPON LEAVING
MY TEACHER

for Donald Justice

1

The clerks are jealous
Over their places.
It's Saturday.

It's Sunday; they
Sit, nevertheless,
High upon their stools:

White shirts, white faces.
The lamps become dull.
They are patiently

Waiting to copy.
Their quills tremble.
Each of them stammers,

Remembering, with
His small conceits,
The master's examples.

2

There is upon him
The look of a Jew
Leaving his ghetto,

One of the dark ones,
Inevitably
Drawing attention

At the first corner
Perhaps, one whose papers
Are not in order—

The very papers
For which he had so
Patiently waited—

And who must wait now,
Watching the others
As they pass safely.

3

The children appear,
The bearded children—
So many of us

Aloft and drifting
Back, on our crisp
Little parachutes.

How gently we come
To the feet of
The one who summons us.

We choose up sides.
One by one we're chosen.
The evening rises

Out of the grass, slowly.
It's dark, there's no one
Calling us home.

4

Our wives grow uneasy.
They gather the lengths
Of our empty silence.

What can we say,
Now that we do not
Know what to think?

We meet in hotels.
We meet like the sons
Of two marriages

Upon the father's
Death—distant, oddly
Repeating ourselves:

Who will abuse us
With the precision
Of self-abuse?