

THE CAMPAIGN FOR
PEACE IN OUR TIME

Once in an adolescent sweat
we planned all night to be righteous;
to be never without poverty
and always unreasonably gentle
(how could they forgive us?)
like fathers, to our wives.

The campaign for peace in our time
distracts, like the coffee talk of saints.
Compassion is a kind of whip
I don't use well—but if I were ardent,
walking into the fields
or over the snow with a step less social,
then I could walk forever . . .

The saint flagellates himself; it seems
to be another man. Not pain,
but the aesthetic of pain is learned.
He knows there is no reward for being hurt.
Slowly he strips his skin.

What a beautiful mistake!
You, or I, the poor men—we who are
neither gentle nor killers in a good cause—
did we find that vacant, flayed skin
and mistake it for a coat?
We are terrified, we are pleased
to wear it, into the streets
and at last to our journals and beds.

From that coat of pain
a certain voice which is half ours
speaks openly, and entertains our lives.
But the campaign for living with ourselves—
which was a saint who became free
is moving swiftly now into the fields,
gliding over the snow—
a heart of great lightness, grown
altogether practical and strange.