

SEEING OUR SOULS

1

He calls us all with a wave of his hand
leading us into the light
and as we come together
we admire one another.
We notice the young ladies' dresses
and the mild smiles which the men are wearing.

He draws everyone within his hearing
leading us into the light
but when we are turned away
at the end it is done
by his voice in the dark hall.
Before we can grow silent he has begun.

2

The house lights are left on while we listen.
His voice is graceless, it glances
over our faces.
His brown eyes rove
around the room as he remarks,
"No one can live this way for long."

From the rostrum he makes a second sign
of welcome when his palm
strokes the stagnant air.
Here—he has said—
is the life
of the world to come.

3

The meaning of his gesture isn't lost.
He has brought us our souls—the dead—
who file up the aisle toward the stage
and stare at us with sad surprise.
There is an honest anguish in their eyes.
They did not know they would be used like this.

On the proscenium steps no ghost
will dare to speak of hell.

They are fair-minded men
who don't wish to develop our dread
or to scare us with wild dreams of death.
Instead they show us their hands full of grief.

4

We begin to believe in the dead. We hope
for their happiness, and a warm groan
like a green pond gathers in our throats
where the words thicken in the wet weeds.
We storm around the stairs but the ghosts escape
onto the stage in a single line.

They try to console us with their eyes.
No they say, it is too soon.
They urge us to remain
happy in the cities of simple shapes,
the innumerable angles of legs and the long blue
buildings of our breath.

5

Sadly they plead for us to understand.
No one was prepared for this
large crowd suddenly mad
men crying to go home
to go back to the land
of our parents.

The spirits promise even this
will be done in time.
They say to return to our places,
but when we obey their voices
and weave back all the room grows dim
as if a curtain fell across the sills of our eyes.

6

In the blackness we can tell every voice
is one voice—his own voice—
and we fill the hall with our cries
until the speaker in the dark demands

that the spirits leave us—
they must not be moved by our bodies.

When the lights appear at last we discover
that he is nowhere to be seen, he is gone
and with him went the reluctant dead.
We rise and walk
away—
it is all over.

A SONG FOR NEW ORLEANS

Oh the wine's fine
but listen you drink too
damn much, I drink too damn

much fine wine eating
salty fish, we have to
get out of this place

I can't whistle
you can't kiss
eating salty fish.