

During the war to end all wars  
so many didn't come back from or come through  
whole fought like all of them with gas  
lies and bloody hands gun runners  
selling to both sides elastic money  
bought across the wires at high mark-up  
war just another monopoly  
creating demand for its business  
intellectual internationalists  
enlisted *pro patria* alongside  
the loyal opposition the arts of peace  
as dead as atheism in the trenches;  
    pissing off friends and enemies alike  
with his flair for *ad lib* invective  
his unflappable sense of his own genius  
averse to confinement in terms like *self* and *soul*  
genitive by definition foggy around the edges,  
still young and cocky enough to want to see  
what all he could get away with  
blasting away at the staid and strait-laced  
out of one side of his Underwood  
recounting troubadours' affairs from the other  
finding in ancient Aquitaine and China  
Augustan Rome and the odyssean world  
refuge of sorts from the current derangement;  
    admitting in print to finding himself relaxing  
when in conversation with beautiful women  
more often than not of independent means  
though the talk be nothing but nonsense  
the purring of invisible antennae  
the daughter goddess returned with knowing eyes  
the goddess of mercy and compassion at hand,  
though the propensity of American men  
to fall head over heels then think marriage  
a foregone conclusion was a matter of lawn party wit,  
engaging with lettered women who in a breath  
speak of equality independence  
and a longing to serve and sacrifice, a desire  
to be wholly used by the one who loves them,  
of loving themselves best when in love  
feeling most themselves when lost in another  
more lovable loving than being loved  
though lovable having both use and exchange  
value does involve reciprocity  
*I love you* he said. *Strange* she said

*that I feel none the better for it;*  
having an aging Voltaire in veiled play  
on Ovid's tongue-in-cheek advise his younger  
unfaithful lady *To stop loving and being*  
*lovable, that is the real death.*

Moving with increasing difficulty  
through the rising swill of hypocrisy  
swamping *la vittoria mutilata*  
after promises broken east and west  
patriots betrayed treaties ignored  
the red flood sweeping in from the east  
the US ducking out of Versailles  
big business at the wheel the state  
increasingly in the hands of media money  
reversing the *ante bellum* trust-busting  
rejecting the Geneva Protocols  
refusing to take responsibility  
for securing the peace it had pushed through,  
the Big Three a repeat in history  
Vienna Verona the same old liberal  
imperialist usocracies in command  
splitting up Poland and dividends  
setting things in motion for the next carnage;  
laughing himself silly feet propped up  
on the front row balcony rail  
cowboy hat on amber-waved head enchanted  
as talkies came in and magic lanterns went out  
with pratfalls doubletakes slapstick  
sight gags muggings cornball plots  
hypnotic characters in close-ups  
an almost animal magnetism  
serifed titles translating their pantomimes  
so how their mouths move may tell a different story;  
all the arts on the left bank aspiring  
to the condition of music though it be ragtime  
dixieland and atonality,  
teaching himself (knowing Vivaldi's delight  
in it) *il fagotto* 'the bundle of sticks'  
around not an ax but measures of breath,  
with his *compagna virtuosa* restoring  
the red priest's genius to the world, giving  
sustenance to the bad boy composer  
of *ballets mécaniques* and *sonatas sauvages*  
before and after the riots and headlines they caused,

twice a father in a two-year period  
once by nature once by convention caring  
he said not a damn about private affairs  
private life or personal interests,  
believing life impossible if you  
stop to consider personal feelings, the only  
reason people can live near each other  
is because they leave each other alone  
the important thing being to get on with the work  
production the goal not generation;

trying to find among the hobby-horses  
hare-brained schemes and mass pipe-dreams  
of genitive case *memento mori* some key  
in which to sound a proper canticle,  
composing his own operatic *montages*  
music for voices and diverse instruments  
set to the words of Villon and Cavalcanti  
in horizontal harmony music  
the most abstract of the arts and best model  
of *mens sana in corpore sano*  
in psycho-sociological terms  
a method for unity in diversity  
a polity of unequals at peace  
the good understood in the widest ethical sense  
Pythagoras at the blacksmith's anvil  
hammering out the laws that compose the universe;

Picabia gone to hell Cocteau in *Vogue*  
Léger's photograph in *Vanity Fair*  
young London awhirl in Coward's *Vortex*  
Eros removed from Piccadilly Circus  
Sr Stirling starting to lose his edges  
among the puns on sounds signs and substance  
of his given family and assumed names  
before pulling out of a Paris taken over  
by surreal neo-nietzschean clatter  
to swim in a smaller pond south of the Alps  
while undergoing his own *transformismo*  
coming to focus less on form than *praxis*  
how to get things done in the real world  
the plutocratic present governed by money  
with a thin mask of democratic pretense,  
switching from myths of aesthetic creation —  
the body a perfected instrument  
of the increasing intelligence receiving  
the radiant world of moving energies —

to myths of history and high finance  
a global agrarian economy  
a just price based on use value  
everyone granted purchasing power choosing  
to choose the true the useful the beautiful —  
poems having not only drawing room  
effects but active political results;  
    concurring with Dante Aquinas and Aristotle  
that if the *dictatores* each in himself  
or *in senatus* are upright and just empire  
might not be so bad, yet still  
trying to figure out where the rot began  
that ate the hull that sank the ship that drowned  
the crew that sailed out past the gates  
into the cold Atlantic of the mind  
the euxine Pacific of the heart.

In the collapse following the Crash —  
the central banks bankrupting Central Europe  
while letting the lesser banks loan at obscene rates  
money they didn't have and brokers sell  
at top dollar stocks they knew were worthless  
to people they knew couldn't afford to lose,  
    disgust with the liberal establishment  
more virulent by the second,  
intellectuals of all stripes  
fed up with hands-off economic  
politics and boardroom ethics,  
a wealth of movements at hand promising power  
without obligations of democracy,  
nostalgia for the past that never was  
a kind of obvious inanity  
to a decade flooded in theories  
of how to get things back on track,  
    the utter stupidity and venality  
of agricultural authorities  
ordering farm crops destroyed when people  
no longer had the money to buy them  
eggsuckers again in the henhouse  
bankers in the mint the infamy of a nation  
required to pay interest on its own money  
borrowed from private parties in order  
to keep people from starving in a land of plenty,  
    the failures of capitalist democracy  
in promising individual freedom and formal

political equality but denying  
the social basis of personality  
the social power of money creating instead  
the most impersonal unequal  
mechanical civilization in history  
everyone isolated from everyone else  
(any oligarchy with half a brain  
of course setting up a two-party system,  
credit to Chesterton of all people  
for seeing that party politics will work  
only when the parties are Tweedledum and dee);  
    though he'd made it with ears burning past songs  
that might have driven him mad learning  
a thing or two about melody in the process,  
though aware his own strings were best tuned  
to snowflakes falling in oriental winter  
the purring of a tame cat in his mistress's lap,  
knowing you can't play all tunes at once  
or both ends of a string against the middle  
yet fearing a nation once utterly corrupt  
can as Ruskin had warned be redeemed  
only by military despotism,  
tempted to conclude with Yeats writing  
new words to the popular airs of the crowd  
as marching songs for blue and brown shirts  
that western civilization having wound up  
as mindless murderous bureaucracy  
implementing an inner circle's ends  
nothing short of apocalypse would do:  
the *tabula rasa* wiped clean with phenolic  
the pestilence completely eradicated  
violence without hatred without  
the spirit of revenge a purifying force  
the tree of liberty refreshed with blood  
any means the right means which will  
re-magnetize the will and the knowledge  
*Fiat lux* that those to come next may start fresh  
that the State should loan not borrow;  
    though at the top of his game in his fifties  
writing off to natural maturation  
the fact that smiles let alone joy and glee  
(*jouissance* the troubadours' supreme value  
*hilaritas* a sure sign of the gods)  
came less and less of late, the light bridging  
with love aforethought the gap between life and death

less often, keeping to himself  
any qualms that it all might be  
pretentious bullshit the works of genius  
crank racist bigot a lonely kitten  
crying for attention the ego throwing up  
mask after mask after mask coherence (though likely  
no more than an *idée fixe* just another  
solipsistic nightmare) with luck  
a kind of totalitarian synthesis  
at peace in some meaningful sense of that word  
ends tied up opposites reconciled  
everything consanguineous  
the me-myself-and-I isolated  
in all its infinitive variability  
seeming to contain multitudes;

    confounding his faith in *sinceritas* his belief  
that looking straight into one's heart and calling  
things by their right names is the ultimate *virtù*  
the source of the poet's dignity and respect  
(in Greek as in Chinese the sun pointing  
precisely to the deed thought judgment word,  
even as late as second century Rome  
Sol's rays illuminating what  
one is and has consciously come to terms with)  
*sinceritas* a man standing by his word  
an axe by the cherry tree twists of the tongue  
in stone setting words to the tones of the heart,  
ethics and morality the whole  
social body the process the *tao*  
language in action precise definition  
self-discipline knowledge of nature  
proceeding to order in the family  
the city the state the whole intelligent  
integrity, totalitarian instinct  
a sense of responsibility of the widest extent  
for the well-being of society  
a principle of social consciousness  
the myth expressing reality without  
over-simplification or scission  
*in the beginning was sinceritas*;

    despite the moral stupidity the suburban  
prejudice inhaled with the stench of empire  
reducing persons to abstract ideas in the gas  
recirculated by the star chambers  
the right of the righteous to write off

whole nations whole continents  
as evolutionary dead ends  
their misfortune not to be oneself,  
willing himself blind to the thuggery  
assassinations *squadristi* and castor oil,  
saluting the call to turn the country  
into a *nazione militarista*  
dissidents legally declared insane  
locked up with sterilized schizophrenics  
telling himself and anyone else who would listen  
the Abyssinian mislabeled "Invasion"  
(backed up from before the start by money and oil  
on favorable terms from US banks  
brokered by the House of Morgan to sidestep  
League of Nations sanctions *Neutrality Act*  
definitions of *implements of war*  
and consequently Roosevelt's toothless  
because merely moral embargo)  
was neither war nor imperialism  
but a Kiplingesque bringing of civilization  
to the natives for their own good,  
redemption for the Aduan debacle  
a certain value added to the transaction;  
        even his best friends telling him  
Your letters increasingly incomprehensible  
Your ideas on Social Credit are at best  
amiable lunacy The United States  
you are describing is imaginary  
Don't root out the wheat in a mad desire  
to chase the hares You made a great mistake  
to set up as a wizard Pull your catgut out  
of the petty pond of practical politics  
You are wrong as hell about America;  
        unable or unwilling to deal with the gap  
between his words and reality,  
to shape his square-deal rough-rider  
rhetoric to his new-deal audience,  
to see that no matter how often he threw in  
bully-pulpit race-suicide warnings  
his failure to dissociate  
economic reform from praise of white  
supremacy and Roman politics  
kept both Capitol Hill and the brain trust  
from hearing his main message, he was mad  
as a sack of bees that the walls in DC

didn't fall as easily as they had  
in the literary Jerichos and that  
after he got there out of his own pocket  
though they observed the courtesy protocols  
due his political ancestry  
they gave him even less audience  
than Kung got in the Forbidden City:  
the insulting smile the humoring the flat  
much-too-often mocking refusal to listen  
at all to his plan for preventing the next war  
by simple commonsense monetary measures  
let alone let him bend FDR's ear  
on how to achieve moral rearmament,  
wrenching his already more frequent delusions  
into paranoia his fears into anger  
his wit into a blunt instrument.

By the time the panzers rolled through the Ardennes  
zeroes into the skies of Pearl Harbor  
flying fortresses into the air over Monte Cassino,  
long before he learned that the Tempio  
Malatestiano — his touchstone  
of Renaissance civilization and power of human  
imagination to renew itself, image  
emblem inspiration of his life's work  
since his first visit to Rimini  
that magic year of *Ulysses The Waste Land*  
and the March — had been hit by allied bombs,  
the pivot had begun to wobble badly:  
dwindling hope turned into vehemence  
religious dispute into black bile and spit  
to-the-point arguments into change-the-topic  
retreats behind nostalgic vituperation  
his poetry into squirrely jumps between  
discomposed prose and lyrical brilliance  
his invective into a blue streak  
his upbeat ironic erudition  
into recondite tutorial harangue  
in out-of-date out-of-touch down  
home smart aleck hayseed voices  
his audience anybody's guess,  
his quasi-platonist elitism  
into Fascist *risorgimento* daydreams  
of Machiavelli's ideal *condottiere*  
vortices of power coincident

with vortices of creative intelligence  
running the new corporate republic  
on bourgeois notions of individual  
responsibility for the good of the state  
Confucian beauty-as-order precepts  
(*only the great man* said Mencius  
*can rectify the evils in the prince's head*)  
slightly restyled along futurist lines  
even *der Führer* might buy into  
once he saw how well it worked in Naples.