

It was about a week later
when the gentlemen came from the firingsquad
of course I came away quietly
to here

Now I fully agree with them
a man must learn to die with dignity
and though they've a cruel job I see them
as essentially honorable men

And they've given me the time in this place
to work it all out in my head
and make peace with my past

Babysitter

man he says I always did
want to meet one of you college dudes
then horse lids his eyes and he puts his head
back on the top of the chair
the cigaret lolls in his mouth

he is 18 but looks 25
he has been in and out
of various joints since age 13
first time he eyeballed my books
as if they represented the ultimate heist
he is one of Blithering Jack's boys
quite paranoid and a potential danger
sometimes Jack drops him by
when the heat's after him
or he thinks they are

asleep he turns his head
and the cigaret begins to burn
the left shoulder of his shirt
the smoldering fire moves
like a slow eruption of acid
in a vial of very pure water
he has a tattoo that is
being progressively revealed
as the shirtsleeve crumbles away
and I watch wondering what it is

he wakes with a rising slapping
motion and gets things under control
then he looks at me and I
walk over pretending
I had fallen asleep too
there is a terrible angry black skull
perched on angry crab-colored flesh
with a turquoise inscription below
which reads DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR

and I have to admit to
feeling a certain envy of him
having no such succinct code to live by
I bring him a damp cloth for his arm
and he lights another cigaret
after awhile Blithering Jack comes back
as usual he gives me some things for
babysitting his boy then they leave

La Cienega, 1957

L'ENFANCE D'UN CHEF

Sandoz worked the west 40 too
he was made to carry the bull food in a quiver
he found it cumbersome but continued
he liked to watch the sun's progress during the course of
a day
& to rehearse the songs he had learned as a boy

The massa had his own skeetshooting trap
on a handsome rocky point overlooking a bend of the river
it was up behind the large and spacious ranch house
his foreman was 84 years old and nearly blind
he got young girls from the town and screwed them
in the pinons all over the ranch
Sandoz heard Slim had to go to the doctor a lot

Sandoz worried an awful lot about the twin villages
down in the valley west of the ranch
there was one wagon track that went in there
one year it got washed out it was never replaced
Sandoz worried about those people as he rode along
he wondered could they grow enuff food
& what would they do if their crops failed
times like that he did not feel like singing

The ruins of an ancient pueblo
stood in an almost hidden corner of the ranch
when he felt blue Sandoz would go sit in the kiva
or that dark room that had been their kiva
it was a gloomy place that smelled bad
but Sandoz didn't mind the odors
nor the condoms left there by the boys from the town
it was a good place to shelter from the rain
he could hear the scream in nearby arroyos
always here rain meant flash floods
and maybe stock would be drowned

He sat and listened
he sat & looked at the crumbling walls
in the dim light till his eye sockets hurt