

## THE CRITIC

When I was a sophomore in college  
and had moved back home for a couple of years  
my mother had the living room painted  
and then she came home one day with two paintings  
from the department store and asked me,  
"Which do you think would look the nicer  
over the mantelpiece?"

I told her I thought the space above the mantelpiece  
looked just fine without decoration  
but she was dead set on having a painting there.  
So I took a look at them.

One was an ersatz Utrillo  
and the other a little girl with peaches-and-cream  
complexion  
in a flouncy, fire-engine-red dress.

I was not so completely ignorant  
that I did not know Utrillo was already a living-room  
cliché,  
but I guess I loved Paris long before I ever got there  
because I've always had a weakness for Parisian street  
scenes.

And anyway, the girl in the fire-engine dress  
was just out of the question.

So I gave my mother my emphatic opinion  
and the next day, sure enough,  
the Utrillo was back in the store  
and the fire-engine girl on the wall.

Over the years we have failed to improve  
our aesthetic rapport.

## THAT'S LIFE

My daughter is explaining to her eight-year-old brother  
the rating system for films,

and when she gets to " ... and X means  
that kids can't get in at all,"

he says, "I bet those are the only good ones."