

DO YOU USE A NOTEBOOK?

many a time when I drive this black beauty out of the driveway of my home, drive down the hill, turn right at the signal, wait, take a left, run down 3 blocks, take another left, go another 2 blocks, and then onto the freeway

many a time I think,
what am I doing here?
why am I in this car?
what am I supposed to be? --

going to the racetrack at 11 a.m. while other men are working

I turn on the radio and light a cigarette.

what am I doing with this leisure?

where did the factories go?

and the whores?

and the drunktanks?

then

such thoughts pass

and I begin to think of my new system, it's going quite well -- it's most interesting how just balancing these 3 numbers on each horse usually selects a winner about 40% of the time that is not a favorite.

and then the thoughts mix as I cut between a tanker and a volks: when the interviewers come by they want to know about writing --

what are your influences?

do you use a notebook?

do you revise?

why do you write?

... and I begin talking about the horses and everybody looks discouraged, including the lady I live with.

"he always talks this way," she tells them.

I drive the black beauty toward the track, rolling back the automatic roof for more sunshine.

they don't understand -- it's been a gamble to begin with and nothing ever solidifies into surety; no gift remains that isn't constantly earned and re-earned; to linger incessantly upon the grounds of literature and learning is not only inhuman, it's dumb.

... driving into the track I stop to pay the parking lot attendant.

he knows me: "how's it goin, champ?"

"just trying to make it," I tell him.

I drive toward preferred parking, valet's no good: they burn out cold engines getting the machines to the people after the 9th race.

I park between a Dodge van and a Volks rabbit thinking, Ernie would have understood and surely, Manolete, and all these people here ahead of me, already parked and in there waiting, getting ready.

I get out, lock the car and walk toward the gate. it is a telling and a beautiful day, and knowing the terror, the luck and the grace, I move deliberately toward the action the mountains up there like that hearing my footsteps as I walk on in.

KENYON REVIEW, AFTER THE SANDSTORM

coming off that park bench after that all night sandstorm in El Paso and walking into the library I felt fairly safe even though I had less than two dollars was alone in the world and was 40 pounds underweight, it still felt normal and almost pleasant to open that copy of the Kenyon Review 1940

and marvel at the most brilliant way those professors used the language to criticize each other for the way they criticized literature. I even felt that they were humorous about it, but not quite; the bitterness was rancid and red steel hot, but at the same time I felt the leisurely and safe lives that language had evolved from: places and cultures centuries soft and institutionalized. I knew that I would never be able to write in that manner, yet I almost wanted to be one of them or any of them: being guarded, fierce and witty, having fun in that way.

I put the magazine back and walked outside, looked south north east west.

each direction was wrong. I started to walk along.

what I did know was that overeffusive language properly used could be bright and beautiful.

I also sensed that there might be something else.