

i was reared intellectually on existentialism.  
for the existentialist there are no plots  
because there is no Plotter.  
a story happens into existence  
and creates its essence as it goes.  
in this state of chronic uncertainty,  
in which all choices are made,  
the characters, not to mention the writer,  
experience existential angst.

i'm now convinced my existentialism  
has prevented me from concocting  
commercially marketable manuscripts.

if i get much poorer, i intend  
to become a structuralist.

#### MY RETIRING COLLEAGUES

##### i.

they made an offer they couldn't refuse  
to my colleagues near retirement age.  
it's known in academic irony  
as the golden handshake.  
it gives incentive to retire early  
they say it will make way for new blood.  
i didn't see anything wrong with the old.

##### ii.

when i was still untenured  
this old military-man-turned-professor  
wrote the advisory committee that i should  
be let go because i dressed like a slob.  
he said my image was not conducive  
to taxpayer support for faculty salaries.  
the chair of the committee  
(of which i was a member)  
was about to entertain discussion  
when neither skarsten spoke up:

"we don't have a dress code.  
it's none of our damned business.  
i move to table."  
and so they did,  
and the threats to take the matter higher  
never materialized.

iii.

i'm convinced that blaze bonazza's  
one glass eye can x-ray female attire.  
the godfather of the fifth floor,  
for years he reigned as disraeli of the back bench  
in the academic senate. when my first thin sheaf  
of verse appeared in 1966 in an edition of 300,  
blaze immediately invited me to read to a literary  
circle in his home. he began his last speech  
in the senate with, "i may be a lame duck,  
but i'm not a dead duck yet. this, however,  
may be my last quack. and incidentally, why did  
the previous speaker refer to me as  
'the former gentleman?'"

iv.

you never listened to dick lyon  
for five minutes without learning something.  
i lived in fear of displaying my ignorance.  
i stood for a lot of things he disapproved of  
but he seemed to have made a unilateral decision,  
years ago, that he'd not disapprove of me.  
he stood for culture. he was a model  
of the educated man.

v.

charles brooks helped to hire me  
and had me to his home.  
abraham avhi and arnie schwab  
encouraged my poetry and only gently  
castigated my grading standards.  
luster williams let me teach  
any course in the catalogue.  
bucky buckland visited my new-born child  
and assured the elders my awkwardness  
was that of youth. charles allen always  
showed the light side of the solid scholar.  
sue wilson put up with me  
with a seafarer's wisdom, and audrey peterson  
joined us at the forty-niner's tavern.

vi.

new blood, indeed;  
the old blood was, like st. emilion,  
high and dry.