

that particular adjective,
still, the week you died you were all set
to marry one of your former students.
so maybe we weren't all that unlike each other
after all.

QUO VADIS, M.F.A.?

do you remember how bartleby the scrivener
felt about his period of employment
in the dead letter office?

that's how i felt this spring
screening a hundred highly qualified applications
for a single one-year non-tenure-track lectureship
in creative writing.

WORKING GIRLS

to listen to the current propaganda
you'd think all women up to 1969
had been occupied entirely as housewives,
and yet it occurred to me the other day
that my mother and all my aunts
had been working women.

my mother was a teacher and very active
in professional organizations.
my aunt elizabeth was private nurse
to a rich lady.
lucy worked on a kodak assembly line
(as did jack).
pat was head of the stenographic pool
at stromberg-carlson.

terese was a saleslady at a detroit department store,
claire a clerk at the department of motor vehicles,
anna louise comptroller for an advertising firm.

when my grandfather, whom i never knew
(except to the extent i know myself),
moved his women to the city,
they went to work,
and they worked the rest of their lives.

elizabeth and lucy and pat and claire
did not marry.
my mother and terese and anna louise did

and ended up with rich husbands
that they outlived.

now claire, though nearly blind,
cares for my nearly senile
(once the exemplar of dignity)
uncle jack.

i hail from a houseful of women
with nary a housewife in the lot.

YOU PROBABLY HAVE TO PUT DOWN A DEPOSIT ON THE SILVERWARE

at norm calvin's texas-style barbecue rib factory
in seal beach, california, i am always
served immediately with a jug of ice water.
i usually order an l.b.j. special:
a barbecue chopped beef sandwich with beans and pickles.
with wine or beer my bill comes to six bucks.

a friend of mine works as a waiter
at a french restaurant in an adjoining town.
he says the waiters are instructed
not to serve water or bread or butter
unless the customer asks twice.
the house wine is nine bucks a bottle.
he says he's never seen a couple
get out of the joint
for less than eighty bucks.

A FAD WITH CONSEQUENCES, OR WHO NEEDS WHOM?

a couple of years ago
a lot of wives i knew
were leaving a lot of husbands i knew.
these were pretty good husbands too,
guys with a lot going for them.
that was part of the problem:
the wives seemed to feel
they'd been living in their husband's shadows.

it seemed to give the wives some pleasure
to put their husbands through bad times.
the wives knew that the husbands weren't used to
being in embarrassing situations.

now the husbands have all been snapped up
by women who know that it's harder than ever
to find a good man,