

GOOD BREEDING WILL OUT

"you got your hair cut!" they say.
almost everyone says,
"you got you hair cut!"

my friends don't bother. they know
that for years i've gone in every
four months, whether i need it or not,
to some barber who, for ten bucks or less,
will cut my hair, beard, and especially mustache
back to just about nothing.
then i let it all start growing out again.
paying no heed to it,
owning neither brush or comb,
washing it daily,
but otherwise oblivious, and, one
hopes, concentrating on more important things.

there are always a few who,
knowing neither me nor academic life,
at least in long beach,
very well,
conjecture that i've been ordered,
presumably by some vice-president of decorum,
to have my leontine locks castrated:

samson longbeachistes.

nah, it's just that i've always felt
a gentleman should be willing to
blow at least thirty bucks a year

on good grooming.

DICKENS DICKINSON MELVILLE HARDY HUGO

i read a reviewer who says, "a case, of
course, can be made that those who write
least, write best."

i suppose he has poets like philip larkin
in mind ... and larkin wrote some fine
poems ... before ceasing to write poems
at all, eight years before his death.

which leads to the corollary: "the
perfect poet is he who writes nothing."
valery might have approved of this,
in his own way, and leonardo in his,

but it is also calculated to appeal to the least fertile undergraduate or coffee house poseur.

it's a logically compelling argument, this appeal to perfectionism; the only defense i can offer is a listing of names:

chaucer, shakespeare, milton, wordsworth, tennyson, browning, yeats,

for starters.

the poete maudit might notice that les fleurs de mal is not a particularly slim volume of verse.

in other words, from the venerable bede to charles bukowski, barring early death or other such impediments, real writers have always tended to write quite a lot.

HER FINEST QUARTER-HOUR

i was always crazy about jodie foster although i kind of quit saying much about it after hinckley's letters entered the public domain,

but she was on night watch the other morning with charley rose, who is usually one of the better interviewers,

and this time he kept insisting on asking her to discuss the hinckley experience, even though it was clear they had agreed in advance that it would not be discussed.

twice she told him they'd have to move on: then finally she said,

"i'm afraid if you ask me that question one more time i'm going to have to do something that will embarrass you, like walking out of here."

"no, don't do that!" he said.

dear god, i pray for strength to conduct myself with the selfsame