

THE FALL

November 22, 1963

We fall like leaves
that drowse and drop,
and any grief
that outlives winter
drowns in the heedless
floods of spring.

Few fall like oaks,
breaking the branches
of some that stood near,
leaving a space
that many a summer
fails to fill.

Your fall,
like Agamemnon's,
shook the earth;
beyond the seas
strange women wailed
in empty terror.

Like Agamemnon,
you were a man
until you fell—
power and faults
more than replaceable.
Then, all at once,

your fall was hardly
some man's whom fate
had briefly raised,

one who survived
an endless war
and now leaves orphans:

Agamemnon dead
was not that king,
no, not the man
Achilles loathed,
sacker of cities
treading purple robes,

one who conceivably
deserved to die—
as who does not?—
and fated anyway:
as if a few
years mattered.

Pity is dwarfed by terror:
leaves we behold
as through a glass,
wistful and distant,
and even the oak
is a stranger.

Your fall crashed the glass:
though the seasons
change on the stage,
torrents of spring
cannot still the icy
wind from outside.

That men will speak
endlessly as of
Atreus' son
of you, too,

seems less than this breach
you struck unknowing,

struck unconscious.
Shivering,
we feel the blindness
even of princes
whose fame is so unlike
all they imagined.

Your growth is beggared
by the splintering crash.
But had you done less,
you might have fallen,
a floating leaf
that drops to sleep.