

## **Poetry and Poetics: some critical-creative reflections**

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Christopher Norris is Emeritus professor at Cardiff University. Recently, he began to address philosophical questions through poetry. In his paper, he explains why. Rather than expressing definite ideas in an elegant way, poetry can be intended as a process from which new ideas (also philosophical ones) can emerge. The result are a number of poems which cover a variety of issues, ranging from philosophy to politics, arts, history of ideas and science. *Itinera* has already begun to publish a few of these poems in previous issues and is now presenting three of them on painters (Turner, Matisse, Magritte).

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## **Poetry and Poetics: some critical-creative reflections**

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Over the past decade-or-so I have very nearly turned aside from “normal” academic work and now spend much of my time writing poetry, though often in a form – the philosophical poem or verse-essay – that looks back to my earlier academic interests. Surprisingly to me the reception has been stronger among philosophers than literary critics/theorists, no doubt because many of the latter regard it as lamentable backsliding on my part to produce poetry in a range of formalist (rhyming and metrical) modes. I’ve no right to feel in the least aggrieved about that since, on the face of it, my verse-practice is flatly opposed to positions taken in my early critical writings and represented in the volume of essays *Post-Structuralist Readings of English Poems*, coedited with Richard Machin way back in 1984. I shall put the case, first, that rhyme and meter are resources that poetry cannot neglect without great loss, and second, that they provide the kind of creative stimulus that current “advanced” practitioners fail to reckon with or match.

I guess one reason for the switch of focus to poetry was a kind of preconscious and pre-emptive strategy for coping with the prospect of retirement. This is not the kind of life-crisis that makes it into bestselling autobiographies or novels – even psychiatric studies – but it does present a fairly daunting prospect to academics like me who have devoted a sizable part of their working lives to the writing of books mainly aimed at fellow-academics. While I didn’t want to carry on the same sorts of work – in the genres of scholarly monograph and journal article – I did want (and need) to carry on writing, and preferably writing that stayed in touch with my earlier interests. Hence the poems on a range of themes from subject-areas such as literary theory, poetics, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, deconstruction, aesthetics, musical history, musicology, and the history of ideas. Even the more lyrical and, to most readers,

recognisably “poetic” pieces will often – I hope – ring allusive bells or conjure ancestral voices for readers fairly used to that sort of thing. Teaching, writing, and theorising about poetry over a long period makes it pretty much impossible, and a misdirected effort in any case, to revert to some notional purity of impulse before the cerebral demon struck. The idea of writing a latter-day equivalent of Coleridge’s marvellous *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is one that has periodically grabbed me but proved highly elusive. Besides, we know from J. Livingston Lowes’ remarkable study *The Road to Xanadu* how effectively (if pre-consciously) Coleridge was able to cover his just as remarkable extent of background reading.

On the one hand I’m inclined to go bullish about this and say there’s a place for “literary” poetry, the kind that’s primarily addressed to readers who’ll pick up the allusions, respond to the tonal shifts and complexities, register detailed differences of verse-form, and so forth. In that mood I’d suggest that stretching the mind around issues of a non-technical but fairly challenging philosophical or scientific sort is something that poetry is entitled to do and that may help to broaden readers’ horizons beyond the lyric, first-person, or confessional modes currently most in fashion. At the same time I recognise that poetry like mine is likely to conjure resistance not only amongst objectors on familiar grounds of its “unpoetic” or overly cerebral character but also amongst those – theorists, critics, experimental or avant-garde poets – who subscribe to just the sorts of advanced (e.g., post-structuralist) thinking that I once very firmly espoused. Oddly enough I don’t feel that I’ve abandoned or repudiated such ideas but kept to their spirit while distancing myself from some of their more dogmatic, less creatively promising aspects. If William Empson, as it seems, left off writing poetry at about the time he started work on his own critical-theoretical masterpiece *The Structure of Complex Words* then my own late-career trajectory has taken just the opposite direction. That is, I have pretty much given up academic (prose) theorizing for a verse-practice still informed by those interests but now finding them best furthered by a quite different set of priorities.

Structuralism and post-structuralism between them did a lot to put language, especially poetic language, at the centre of critical attention. However, in so doing they excluded some dimensions of language – or discourse – that had long been held in high esteem or simply taken for granted. Structuralism found room enough for formal

attributes like rhyme and meter, and indeed produced instances of textual close-reading, like those of Roman Jakobson, that surpassed anything hitherto conceived in sheer wealth of detail and linguistic sophistication. But it also displaced – or sharply devalued – any appeal to subjectivity, whether thought of in traditional humanist-expressivist terms or as the subject-of-enunciation defined by discourse-theorists. Structuralist analyses tended to turn poems into miniature versions of Saussure’s *la langue* – language-as-a-whole, structurally conceived – and leave them strangely devoid of animating import or intent. Post-structuralism went even further in its all-out assault on the humanist (or “bourgeois-liberal”) subject as repository of all things shabbily collusive with the reigning ideology of capitalism.

Moreover, with its literal-minded raising of Saussure’s methodological precepts – like the primacy of the signifier and the “arbitrary” (non-motivated) nature of the sign – into a full-scale creed with sanctions attached post-structuralism tended to cut poetry off from any commerce with issues beyond its own theoretical concerns. This curiously skewed sense of priorities was then carried across into creative endeavours like those of Oulipo in its later stages and the mainly US-based L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poets. It was evidenced mainly by their fondness for writing pieces made up of little more than thoughts in a vaguely post-structuralist key and identified as poetry only by conventional markers like non-justified right margins. A chief motive here was to get as far as possible from various constraints – of rhyme, meter, form, ideology, the “transcendental signified”, bourgeois subjectivity, etc. – and exploit whatever liberating powers might be found in the “free-play” of the unbound signifier. This motive went along with a desire to harness whatever elements of randomness might be derived from Saussure’s “arbitrary” signifier/signified dyad and from the semioclastic idea that poetry – or any poetry worth its cultural-political keep – should push that concept to the utmost limit of its sense-disruptive potential.

If there’s one thing that prompted my switch to writing poems it is the realisation – however late in arriving – that formalism (rhyme especially) is the most effective means of introducing elements of chance that take poetry beyond the limits of preconceived intent or deliberative prose discourse. I have perhaps written enough elsewhere about Heidegger for readers to know that I am not here talking about some kind of depth-hermeneutic or depth-ontological brooding on far-back, often fanciful etymologies

presumed to grant moments of insight unachievable by mere rational thought. That way lie confusions and distortions of a potentially virulent form. What I have in mind – and have tried to practise – is the use of rhyme as a creative-exploratory resource which takes, even forces, the poet into regions very remote from anywhere s/he might have gone if writing in prose with a clear sense of its topical or argumentative bearings. This is why I shouldn't be taken as putting the case, *contra* everything that has happened in poetry since Romanticism, for some unlikely return to an eighteenth-century type verse-practice where the main object is to get doctrines across in as pointed or striking a verbal form as one can. Rhyme then tends to take a heavily end-stopped and rather self-satisfied form, one with prosodically as well as politically conservative leanings.

I won't disguise my own indebtedness to Pope, Dryden, Swift and other poets in that currently unfashionable mode of poetry as public-argumentative discourse. But its tone, ethos, and politics undergo a marked change of character when – in Empson's handy term – it is a matter of “argufying” rather than downright assertoric statement or propositional content. To argufy is to make a case and put it across as effectively as one can but to do so in a fairly informal rather than a strictly logical way. It implies that there may be other ways of looking at the matter and that a willingness to explore alternatives – as for instance by pursuing a rhyme-scheme into uncharted regions of semantic-conceptual space – is the best since the least dogma-prone poetic course to take. Poets and critics can then get on close, even co-creative terms by exploring the kinds of mental-linguistic activity involved when thought achieves some notable high-point of expressiveness, acumen, or self-aware insight. Such activities are utterly remote from Heidegger's notion of “authentic” poetry, like authentic philosophy, as a thinking that broods on the primordial question of Being as raised by certain mostly ancient Greek words whose original sense has long been concealed by the accretions of Western metaphysics. It may faintly be heard, if anywhere, in present-day German through what Heidegger rather absurdly takes as its uniquely privileged relation to that ultimate source. But the hearing requires a deeply receptive mindset, a passive hearkening to that which reveals itself only on condition that the thinker's attention not be distracted by other, less authentic since more busily thoughtful or rationalistic concerns.

I have been putting just the opposite case for poetry in general, and rhyme in particular: that when creatively and intelligently used it sets the mind working in ways

inconceivable on Heidegger's account. Empson in *Complex Words* goes further than any critic, theorist, or philosopher of language toward showing just how this can happen, that is, how language can indeed tap into such charged and suggestive etymons while none the less prompting an active mind to register resistances, ambiguities, aporias, or suchlike complicating factors. Along with some brilliantly perceptive chapters of applied criticism the book finds room for a striking rejoinder to Owen Barfield, an Anglo-Welsh delver-back into the early history of words with something of Heidegger's yen for primordial (quasi-)truths but without the added block to critical thought put up by Heidegger's oracular tone. For Empson, this deference to ancient verbal roots as a source of wisdom goes along with a drastic under-estimation of human intelligence and a dangerous proneness to enlistment in irrationalist movements and creeds. Having rhyme play its part in the complex dialectic of senses and implications is what poetry does most strikingly but also – as he constantly reminds us – a lesson in the ways that “ordinary language” may evince powers of complex mental processing as basic to everyday communicative discourse as to literary language. To let it go for the sake of adherence to some abstract, poetically damaging set of doctrinal precepts is to sacrifice a large part of what haunts the sharp-eared reader of the most compelling poems.

A formal scheme with rhyme-patterns sustained over several lengthy stanzas can sometimes press a poet out beyond the zone of more-or-less obvious word-choices and thus to a region of new possibilities undreamt of before that point. It is a whole dimension of poetic creativity given up by free-verse practitioners, or those for whom language is conceived primarily in post-structuralist or kindred terms. No doubt this is partly a matter of the differing approaches taken, or experiences undergone, by practising poets as distinct from theorists or commentators. Sound-sense relationships and other features of formal verse are apt to be felt in a far more active, challenging and stimulating way by writers in the process of finding out such creative possibilities than by those engaged in remarking their presence or – as so often nowadays – dismissing them as obsolete.

Having earlier done my share to propagate post-structuralist ideas that I now find less than congenial I should perhaps say why they once held such strong theoretical appeal. Anyone comparing the state of Anglophone literary theory before and after *circa* 1970 –

roughly the time that those ideas entered the scene through graduate seminars and a slew of translations from the French – will surely be struck, whatever their opinion of it, by the rapid infusion of intellectual energy and speculative flair. Literary theory, up to then a distinctly marginal or specialist sub-discipline, became not only a significant (albeit fiercely contested) presence in departments of English or Comparative Literature but a prominent source of controversial new ideas in subject-areas as various as history, philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and the human sciences at large. However – as I have said – that ferment went along with a tendency to substitute its own complications and internal debates, under the empire-building title “theory”, for anything like the old practices of literary criticism, interpretation, or scholarship. I was as prone to this as anyone, a point noted – usually in a tone of gentle but firm reproach – by Frank Kermode in reviews of my books during the 1980s and ‘90s. His lament was that I and other critic-theorists of the younger generation seemed to have pretty much lost interest in poetry and headed off for pastures new or disciplinary fields more (to them) invitingly exotic. Empson had a similar though more explosive reaction when I sent him some of Derrida’s early texts in translation, hoping for comments I might cite in my Ph.D. thesis. The comments when they came were extremely ill-tempered, magnificently off the point, and certainly not thesis material.

All the same they suggest that we shall get things askew about Empson’s poet-to-theorist trajectory if we take it to show, as commentators have, that he stopped writing poetry at around the time when his work toward *Complex Words* provided an adequate substitute activity in creative and intellectual terms. That story is probably right so far as it goes but fails to take its own most essential point: that this was a switch of focus, not object, or indeed – more accurately – not so much a switch as a focal adjustment that held many continuities with his earlier work, both the poetry and the criticism. What Empson so hated about the Derrida texts – a mistaken impression, based on rapid scanning and my fault for unconscionably asking him to read them – was the detachment of “theory” from anything like that intensely close-focused and active critical engagement that makes *Complex Words* such a uniquely enthralling book. The continuity I am speaking of also has much to do with the strongly marked “argufying” element in Empson’s poetry, or his flat rejection of the Romantic-Symbolist-Modernist

veto on poems that allowed the leopards of discursive intellect into the sacred space of metaphor, symbol, and inwrought structure.

So whatever the facts about his «giving up poetry» there is a more basic sense in which – as he once remarked during an interview – Empson «continued to do the most important work to hand», or, in this context, the kind of work that showed the fallacy of such ideas. They ignore what he himself didn't have time or patience to appreciate in Derrida: the extent to which critical, theoretical and creative powers may coexist and interact to produce poetry, philosophy or criticism of the highest order. Though I cannot for a moment claim to have approached their levels of achievement it is largely the example of these two great thinkers/creative writers – and why carry on making that distinction when they have done so much to discredit it? – that I have kept pretty steadily in view from various angles. Although it might seem out of kilter when set against my earlier theoretical interests and allegiances there is, I am convinced, a real affinity between them and one that can most usefully be approached from both sides. In a less bureaucratic and specialised academic culture I would not have felt the need to go these lengthy ways around in making some fairly basic points about the nature of intellectual creativity.

(NB: I have not provided the usual academic apparatus of notes and references since this is a fairly informal piece and, besides, the sources referred to can readily be looked up on Google.)

## Three poems on painters

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### Turner: moon and clouds

Somehow I put the clouds behind the moon.  
Should plain good sense relinquish metaphor  
Or knowledge stifle fantasy too soon?  
Take what I need from science, nothing more.  
The vision clear, the moment opportune -  
Let art not yield to seeing's docile lore!

Make no mistake, they're both out to lampoon  
My work: the Country Constables deplore  
My raging seas, my "landscapes" roughly hewn  
From warring elements, while those who score  
It up to genius always seem to croon  
A set-piece from the *echt-Romantik* store.

They hymn the native (read "naïve", jejune  
Or simple-minded) gift that has me pour  
My soul-storms onto canvas as if strewn  
By a paint-sloshing moron. "Clouds before  
The moon, not mirrored in a sky-lagoon  
Behind it" – let them titter or guffaw,

Those critics, still they'd sing a different tune  
If they but knew how fierce the endless war

That's waged in me, how what they think the boon  
Of my "sublime simplicity" or "raw,  
Untutored passion" – like some great buffoon  
Sloshing it on – requires I show the door

To those (let's face it) sometimes picayune  
Effects of mine with all the arts I shore  
Against mere chaos – form, technique, the soon  
Apparent need that ecstasy not soar  
Too high so my sublime takes wooden-spoon  
For turning sheer grotesque (my reject-drawer

Can offer proof enough). That cloudless moon  
Was like the wild *melée* of sea and shore  
Plus every "fault" or "error" they'd impugn,  
Those staid academicians who ignore  
Whatever truth this gross unlettered loon  
May glimpse of man and nature in the raw.

For that's the kind of truth a sheer platoon  
Of critics swats away lest what they saw  
For just an instant might at length maroon  
Them in its swirling depths, reveal each flaw  
Of mine a vision-portal, and commune  
With all that stirs the soul to love and awe.

## **The Red Studio (Matisse): a terzanelle**

1

Twelve years I kept it, then thought: let it go!  
Why have it clutter up my work-life space?  
Twelve years I kept it, then thought: let it go!

It shows too much to leave itself a place;  
Well-furnished, that “Red Studio” of mine.  
Why have it clutter up my work-life space?

Fast forward and you get the warning sign,  
“Set-theoretic paradox – beware!”.  
Well-furnished, that “Red Studio” of mine.

Just see it, all my stuff assembled there,  
My paintings, sculptures, furniture, and all.  
Set-theoretic paradox – beware!

No installation, nothing to install  
Since it’s without and they’re within the frame,  
My paintings, sculptures, furniture, and all.

A piece of furniture, that thing became.  
Twelve years I kept it, then thought: let it go!  
Now it’s without and they’re within the frame.  
Mere bits of furniture, those things became.

2

I saw it suddenly: Venetian red!  
Same stuff, same studio, but with red slapped on.  
I saw it suddenly: Venetian red!

First try was pink but that's for the salon.  
"Pink Studio" gave those things the merest tint;  
Same stuff, same studio, but with red slapped on.

A real eye-stunner, not a gentle hint:  
Brush it on thick, let naturalism wane!  
"Pink Studio" gave those things the merest tint.

Flat, abstract, monochrome – a surface plane,  
Its contents laid out strictly on a par:  
Brush it on thick, let naturalism wane!

Don't tell me "just portray things as they are".  
Viewed without preconception, they're so many  
Sense-contents laid out strictly on a par.

One day my "insights" will be two-a-penny.  
I saw it suddenly: Venetian red!  
Viewed without preconception, they're so many  
Twice-born latecomer "insights": two-a-penny!

3

They'll say "ground-breaking – wonder if he knew",

And label me “intuitive”, “naïve”.  
They’ll say “ground-breaking – wonder if he knew”.

I knew alright, but that they can’t conceive!  
Red monochrome, flat surfaces, the lot.  
They’ll label me intuitive, naïve.

I saw it coming, gave it my best shot.  
Young Rothko got the message, took my lead,  
Red monochrome, flat surfaces, the lot.

It’s me they thank, those brave souls newly freed:  
Junk narrative, perspective, stuff like that!  
Young Rothko got the message, took my lead.

Maybe they’re over-keen to count old hat  
What I took half a life to leave behind:  
“Junk narrative, perspective, stuff like that!”.

Still it’s those old conventions kept me blind.  
They’ll say “ground-breaking – wonder if he knew”.  
What I took half a life to leave behind  
Was old conventions, those that kept me blind.

4

Six paintings, one ceramic, sculptures three.  
They’re all in my “Red Studio”, take a look.  
Six paintings, one ceramic, sculptures three,

Though flattened, planiform, and brought to book –

Why let the old *trompe-l'oeil* stuff have its way?  
They're all in my "Red Studio", take a look.

Loved it – still do – that 3-D goods-array,  
It's just that those perspectives cramp my style:  
Why let the old *trompe-l'oeil* stuff have its way?

Things in-the-round obsessed me for a while;  
Planes of consistency now guide my hand.  
It's just that those perspectives cramp my style.

No loss of objecthood when surface-scanned;  
Things make their space that once stood all around.  
Planes of consistency now guide my hand.

Those depths annulled are planar worlds new-found.  
Six paintings, one ceramic, sculptures three.  
Things make their space that once stood all around.  
Those depths annulled are planar worlds new-found.

## Pipes, Apples, Nudes: Magritte

(These poems – five extended villanelles – are based largely on biographical details from *Magritte: a life* by Alex Danchev, London: Profile Books, 2021.)

1

One mystery alone: that world out there.  
Pipes, apples, nudes, that's all that meets my eye.  
Just let those objects claim their proper share.

I've kinks enough for critics to lay bare,  
Like window-shards with fragments of the sky.  
One mystery alone: that world out there.

I've joys, fears, terrors, horror-shows to spare,  
A list the shrinks may work through by and by.  
Just let those objects claim their proper share.

He's faceless, bowler-hatted; in the air  
She floats, a naked wraith; they signify  
One mystery alone: that world out there.

My mother drowned herself, yet if they dare  
Say "Ah, that's it!" my work gives them the lie:  
Just let those objects claim their proper share.

So willingly they fall into his snare,  
The Viennese quack-doctor who'd deny  
One mystery alone: that world out there.

Ask her, love of my life, Georgette Berger,

“Qu’importe ses cauchemars?”, and she’ll reply  
“Just let those objects claim their proper share”.

She knows me best, knows how, and when, and where  
The demons congregate, and half-knows why.  
One mystery alone: that world out there.

For I’ve come through with nothing to declare  
Bar certain scenes where viewers may descry  
Those objects as they claim their proper share.  
One mystery alone: that world out there.

2

It’s things, not symbols, cover my retreat.  
Stay world-fixated, keep the ghouls at bay!  
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

The critics have me tagged: “René Magritte,  
Surrealist”, but who cares what that lot say?  
It’s things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

Tell them they’ve got me wrong, Georgette my sweet;  
These paintings scatter ghouls like break of day!  
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

Those Freudians romp in psyche’s winding-sheet  
As art expires beneath the death-drive’s sway.  
It’s things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

My pipe with riddling caption: “nice conceit”,  
That scoundrel Dali said, “so *recherché!*”.  
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

But I’ll not follow on where those effete  
Surrealists purport to show the way:  
It’s things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

A dream of childhood: chest locked fast to cheat  
The night-time wish that its stored treasures may  
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

Then there’s the crashed hot-air balloon whose heat  
I feel again each time those scenes replay.  
It’s things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

Georgette has things of mine laid out to greet  
Me back from that small-hour *auto-da-fé*.  
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet;  
It’s things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

3

A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.  
They thumb their nose who’ve thumbs in many pies.  
Of low-life matters I’m the one to speak.

My father gambled, drank, sold porn; I’d seek  
Maman for comfort till they closed her eyes.  
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

They're lily-livered, his surrealist clique,  
Just tame court-jesters, out to take the rise.  
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak

Yet not, you'll note, at all the one to pique  
Their taste for graphic puns in saucy guise:  
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

You'd think their lives were tough, their childhoods bleak,  
A mother drowned the scene they fantasise.  
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak.

The "genius" Dali's just a bogus freak  
Who hawks his frissons to whoever buys.  
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

Yet I should talk who watched them take a leak  
Through bathroom-doors ajar, the voyeur's prize.  
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak.

Stick your psychology: it's the mystique  
My things create that cuts grief down to size.  
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

First principle: let object and technique  
Fight demons off before they mobilize!  
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak;  
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

Greek drama stuff, yet mightn't it be true?  
 A hell-bent father, mother's suicide:  
 What chance I'd skip the psychic payment due?

"The Cherokees" they called us, urchin crew  
 Of sibling males, maniacally allied.  
 Greek drama stuff, yet mightn't it be true?

Let's say upbringing and genetic brew  
 Had equal shares when Jekyll turned to Hyde.  
 What chance I'd skip the psychic payment due?

We'd do the worst that juveniles could do,  
 Kill animals for sport, laugh as they died:  
 Greek drama stuff, yet mightn't it be true?

My art alone, the things I sketched or drew,  
 Gave me an object-world to take in stride.  
 What chance I'd skip the psychic payment due?

Don't let those Freudian ghouls bamboozle you,  
 Persuade you all the action's deep inside.  
 Greek drama stuff – what if it's just not true?

For me, the world of objects grew and grew  
 Till their strange antics turned the lethal tide:  
 Some chance I'd skip the psychic payment due.

My message to him: Salvador, your few  
 Successes are the paintings that confide:

“Greek drama stuff – what if it’s just not true?”.

Take it from me: it’s objects pull you through,  
Not fears inbred and thereby multiplied.  
Some chance I’ll slip the psychic payment due;  
Greek drama stuff – what if it’s just not true?

5

“He painted them away”: that’s what she said,  
My Georgette, when they asked what kept me sane.  
It’s painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

The charred balloon, the chest beside my bed,  
Their outlines haunt my brushstrokes, not my brain:  
“He painted them away”: that’s what she said.

I fear you’ve all been grievously misled,  
My friends, by critics’ failure to explain  
It’s painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

They’d have those incongruities best read  
As paroxysms of a soul in pain.  
“He painted them away”: that’s what she said.

If I mislaid the torment and the dread  
Those fools would call the horrors up again.  
It’s painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

Without it they’d conspire to strike me dead,  
All other life-protectors tried in vain.

“He painted them away”: that’s what she said.

Explain that to the Dali bunch, well-bred  
As zoo gorillas rattling their chain:  
It’s painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

Let them read Freud: those inhibitions shed  
May see them dubbed the bourgeois New Urbane.  
“He painted them away”: that’s what she said

And what she knew way back before we wed,  
School sweethearts, she who’d never once complain:  
It’s painting keeps the ghouls outside my head;  
“He painted them away”: that’s what she said.