

Swan Song
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In this room the young folk come and go, sure and safely
Sane, relieved to take their leave, this time, say, of
 Baudelaire, his so-called frère, or flowers
 He called evil for some unknown reason.

In these parts the peach part of our growing season's
Short. Like sad sack meals ingested between classes
Wherein I've failed again, or further failed, to help them care
Much at all—about Prufrock's hair, say, much less his despair.

These window-panes, rasped by chain-mail blinds and
Hail-deranged quatrains, halting lines in any kind of
Weather, warn against a world beyond—the wider,
Colder space to which these windows never open.

I've measured out my life in iambs, strong prescriptions
For new glasses, hedging slashes, pencil-parceled bits of
Pippa Passes, Pale Ramons, and dashes—all while what might
Have been an overwhelming question feigns a bow and
Quits this room through stained loose leaves for curtains.

Directions, portents—all uncertain. Diacritical marks, parentheses
Encrypt my former face. I care that I grow old, I grow old, I
Wear rolls above my trousers, hold chalk without conviction.

Still, truth be told—

Indecision dries dissembled in recirculated air. I've heard me disappear
Inside my diction, forgetting my last question, and with it that much more
Of what I once dared to call a calling, if only to myself. A student, then,
Was more like me, or I like her. There was so much more time, then,
For all our visions and revisions. We read fast, then, past “nor” and “neither,”
Placed far bigger bets on “and”—yes, on “and”—and “or,” and “either.”

Whose murmurs in my ears now impede my leave, (as if) on my own volition?
What could be called my own terms, whatever those would be—were
 I neither not quite me, nor not quite her,
 Neither now mon semblable, nor ma soeur?