

The Last Page

The Poplars of East and West

Even the poplars of Bohemia
marching along the lonely road
fade in the descending darkness
after sunset in the foreshortening landscape
leaves fluttering in the gentle evening breeze
simple, stolid, without pretense
hordes from the West
hordes from the East
come, stay – go?
no freedom left in the darkening land
or in the home
only in the heart

The poplars of Flanders
marching along the abandoned canal
bent by the icy western winds from the sea
with long memories
of sturdy ships loaded with luxurious vestments
of the crackling sounds from Spanish muskets
hordes from the West
hordes from the East
an interval now of freedom, good life for the burghers
and internal discord

The poplars of the meseta of Castile
scattered clumps of stragglers from defeated armies
if you observe long enough
they vanish in the island of dark oak woods
emerging again after a longish while
marching toward the horizon
which holds desperately on a dark cloud
pulling and pulling until freed
propelled by the wind
races exuberantly across the blue sky
The great kings are buried in the Escorial
the great inquisitors
the noble errant knights
the buccaneer explorers
all vanished with the curse of power

The poplars of Michigan, weather beaten
guarding the white-red light house
the white gleaming in the July sun
the red muted in the November fog
moving in from the steely, churning lake
the fog horn droning a melancholy dirge
Since the last Indian moved North
nothing – but nothing ever happens
only the passing of seasons
in the established order
Peace – and seagulls

Eric Stein