

two begun with nothing
working up to this?
America, America,
God had shed his grace.

Naked in the cabana
to put them in the mood
they drank vodka stingers
and made what love they could

then reeled into the hot tub,
too numb to feel regret,
and almost joyfully
boiled themselves to death.

— Harold Witt

Orinda CA

SOMETIMES A SUDDEN MADNESS

Many have gotten the thing to work,
including Van Gogh
who got it to work more beautifully than most,
although the irony
of his all too human life
was that he doubted he had
when he walked into Dr. Gachet's garden
& blew the sun out of his head;
sometimes doubt flares up
like the sudden madness
of a blustering crow in the noonday glare,
then it's good to remember
the placid heron
that wades the beach just before dusk,
its legs glowing like two radioactive rods
as it stalks its dinner.

DEJA VU

We haven't met before,
so I suggest we continue the barroom talk
with a getting-to-know-you literary game:

It goes like this, I say. For instance,
what story would you read on a stormy night?

I get it, she says. I like to read W. W. Jacobs'
The Monkey's Paw on stormy nights.

Oh? I say.

When I go to the seashore in the fall
I read Thomas Mann's Death in Venice.

Um, I say.

In Paris I read Fitzgerald's Babylon Revisited.

Unhuh, I say.

When I visit friends at their country house,
it's Saki's The Open Window ...

I call the bartender & order another round,
having this weird feeling
that maybe we have met before.

THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MIDDLEING

She replies to a mid-life query
with what she considers wifely support:

"I think the gray in your beard," she says,
"makes you look more sexy as a poet."

I refrain from telling her a secret:
that for as long as I can remember
sex has been my chief interest
with poetry taking second;

so, although her reply to my question was nice,
just more sexy would have been nicer.

THE DECLINE OF A WEST

Early on I was enthralled by Ivanhoe
& the other novels of Sir Walter Scott,
the stories & poetry of R. L. Stevenson & Poe,
the pictorial magic
of illustrators like Arthur Rackham
& the joys of playing baseball fairly well,

then upon reaching manhood I became
enamored of Hemingway,
F. Scott, Hammett's The Maltese Falcon,
James M. Cain, Camus, Céline,
Dostoevsky, The Ring of the Nibelungs,
Böcklin's paintings,