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## An Air of Gaiety and Zest

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with embryonic intensity, a life-form  
evolving the attributes of consciousness  
and spite. I could learn much  
from the man who carries the day out  
in a bucket. As he steps from his door,  
another load of sunlight steaming  
in his pail, he looks

happy, pleased by the pace  
of his busy work, much as the woman  
tying the devil to a pillow has a glow  
of satisfaction, beams with the sense  
of a job well done. And of course  
I look up to the man who shoots arrows  
through the roof. It's hard work  
threading the shafts one after another  
through the same tiny hole,  
yet he rarely stops. When he does  
it's to drag an arm across his face  
and look toward the sea  
as if he owns this country.  
Even from here I'm stunned  
by the militancy of this  
shy boast.

## NIGGER

It was a new word and as words went then  
astonishing. After popping  
in the air it fell like the silence of a sheet  
snapped out over a bed. Reaching  
the flanneled back  
of a man leaving the store, it paralyzed him,

gripped his stride and the swing of his arms  
in the cast  
of a momentary statue. From the thicket  
  
of belts I could see half-moon smiles  
rise over the Sunday  
stubbled chins of men huddled at the counter.  
  
When the man had gone they laughed except  
for my father  
and one other, who set pliers, picture hooks  
  
and nine volts on the counter and walked away.  
Each head turned  
to follow him as if blown by the same wind.  
  
As he passed in front of the tube-tester,  
someone shouted  
exotic words which tore the air like a bike  
  
skidding on gravel. The door opened magically  
as he approached  
and was closed some time before the owner  
  
slammed the register drawer, releasing them  
from the space  
they'd been staring at, a bit of air bounded  
  
by rakes and lawnmowers through which  
they'd each soon pass  
after paying what was asked for what was wanted.