

OF THEE WE SING

Yes, America is still singing,
not all of us lifting the same tune
or harmonizing in the same key.

The basic melody is still sweetly familiar
although skies are less spacious,
and the amber ambience of grain waves
succumbs to rooftops, roads and runways--
our "three Rs" of progress. Our mountains
are still purple posing, imposing monuments
to longevity, leadership, lordliness.
Beauty makes a stunning cloak
for arrogance and willful ignorance.

Sometimes our majestic hymn segues
into double-entendre lyrics,
dissonant chords struck at odd intervals,
uneven tempo in certain passages.

Eye on the clock, ear to the cell phone,
hand on the nonmusical keyboard,
righteous casuists talk about war, the economy,
technology, oil. Sophists say democracy
is a bad system but there's nothing better.
And they're right-- except they don't
understand and they feel no obligation.

So who will perpetuate the legacy?
Who will carry the enormous unweildy crate
of our dreams, the damaged chest glued together
with the scum of human flaws, ambition, vanity,
packed with the sum of centuries of hope?

Our song, composed in a major key of faith,
has forgotten verses of prayer and praise.

Who can revamp the music? Who can conduct
the coloraturas, keep the tenors from going flat,
modulate the heroic bass? Who can arrange and
direct the plea for God's grace, for brotherhood?

Nothing else can save us.