CITYSCAPES

by

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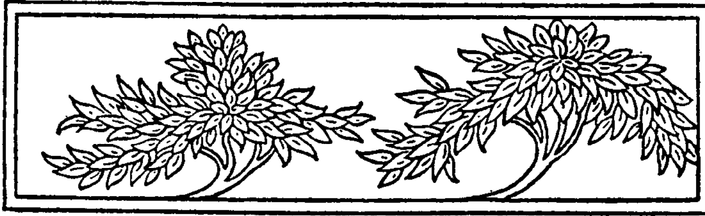

Cityscapes

Ways of Approaching a City

Cities can be approached from without or within. You can use rail, camel, airplane or ship. These approaches are based upon the knowledge that the city exists. You see it as a skyline or a gradually encroaching mass of blocks. You are prepared to meet it and accept its bulk as a complete entity.

I do not accept this as the proper way to meet a city. It can be accessed by degrees, through books or through early perceptions which do not consider the bulk of a city, but jumbles of visions which gradually interlink and grow to form the substance of a city.

Italo Calvino, in his book, *Invisible Cities,* has Marco Polo in a dialogue with Kublai Khan imagine the secret cities of the great Khan's realm. They exist not on the surface but in the sky, are gardens, alleys, lagoons, and streetlamps, but also spider webs, and copper clocks. From their names, Clarice, Dorothea, Euphemia, they are women to be entered with the varieties of sensation that each promises. Can the real cities of the realm be transformed into such promises of sensual experience? Calvino describes a multitude of cities, each with its own characteristic:

A city of sixty silver domes, streets paved with lead, a crystal theater—a man arriving on a special evening when the days are getting shorter and multicolored lamps are lighted all at once. Has anyone before lived an evening identical to this?

A city that he dreamed of as a young man and arrived at in old age—desires are already memories. A city where perfect violins and telescopes are made.

A city of aluminum towers, where the past is told in the corners of the streets, the banisters of steps, the gratings of windows.

A treacherous city which gives form to desire. You believe you are enjoying the city but become its slave.

A city of signs, scales, dolphins, cornucopia. The wares in the stalls are signs of other things. The embroidered headband stands for elegance, the guilded palanquin power, the ankle-bracelet voluptuousness.

A city in which a succession of streets, of houses along streets, of doors and windows of houses, follow one another in your memory like notes of a musical score, immutable in their succession. This city must be memorized.

A city of transportation, with dirigibles flying in all directions, multiple levels of elevated and underground railroads, ramps, and highways, above a deep subterranean lake.

These and other cities live in the imagination and are occasionally transformed into haunting imagery such as the City in Fritz Lang's motion picture *Metropolis,* a city of workers and bosses, a symmetrical city, which runs on a machine and can be destroyed by the machine.

It is possible to first approach a city from within. My early years were spent in midtown Manhattan, near Beekman Place. By the age of five, I wandered seemingly free throughout a time, the late 1930's and early 1940's, when that part of the city was being transformed.

Early memories were not of massive slabs of architecture but of optical vignettes, such as a parallel string of streetlights down and up a hill on Madison Avenue, or the vaginal vaults of the front

doors of old brownstones, thin and high with arched windows on top, behind which suffused pale lights promising mysterious and ominous interiors.

When you live in a city as a child, it becomes a part of your awareness as a series of patterns which blend. The sad part about this experience is that too much of the city is taken for granted and accepted, not really observed. Nonetheless, the city that you see is in no way the same city that the commuter or the casual visitor sees. The only way to change your perspective is to leave the city for years and re-enter it disguised as a visitor. You can never return again.

THE SHAPE AND TEXTURE OF A CITY

Where London is a circle, and Chicago a rectangle encroached on by a lake, New York, or at least Manhattan, developed as a grid with its economic center gradually moving north. The seeming inevitability of northern movement was an incentive for the creation of an interurban line, ambitiously called the Boston and Westchester, which in fact went north only as far as the New York side of the Connecticut border with its southern end in the South Bronx, a bucolic area in the late nineteenth century when the line opened, but unfortunately over three miles and one river crossing away from midtown Manhattan. Though the line traversed some of the most attractive suburban regions to surround a city, and over some spectacularly high trestles, it suffered from an anemia of passengers and expired in 1937. The original interurban line may have achieved some degree of notoriety by being the model for Fontaine Fox's rail connection with the Toonerville Trolley.

One can also talk of semi-cities and jagged linear cities. In his book *City*, William H. Whyte uses the term *semi-city* to describe the clusters of building growth bracketing highways and highway exchanges. There is no central anchor of a large city but a corridor of buildings. These corridor cities display what is becoming more common, the blank wall. Such walls, the sides of buildings, look away from the corridor street. These buildings do not dance with the street. Streets become ignored and disrupted.

Old winding streets have building fronts hugging the sidewalks. Instead of asphalt slabs these streets are, or were, cobblestoned. Cobblestoned streets sparkle with rain, they interact with glistening streetcar tracks. Rain does not reflect off asphalt but the radiance of rain on the cobblestoned street, transformed by streetlight posts which bend downward, reflects onto the walls of closely hugging buildings, creating an image of a street of recollection. Another advantage of cobblestones is their feel under the feet. You sense that you are crossing a street. Asphalt streets are not meant to be noticed tactilely but crossed swiftly.

A city three hundred miles long and less than one mile wide was built, a zigzag scar which moved periodically, sometimes for yards, sometimes for a few miles, rarely for tens of miles. It lasted for about five years, 1914-1918. Its population was hundreds of thousands of men, a parallel line of trenches and no man's land, a central highway and a negative force field. Aspirations, hopes, poems, and the accumulation of hatreds were built up by its transient population, some not so transient. Wilfred Owen, the English poet who died on November 4, 1918, a week before the armistice, was an inhabitant of that city for the better part of two years. Based upon the poems he wrote during the period of his sojourn in the trenches, he was considered to be a poet of great promise. One poem, in several versions, was finally entitled "SIW." It is about a soldier who tries to live up to his father's admonition not to be a coward. He dodged a bullet an hour but finally succumbed. The bullet was English. "SIW" stands for "self-inflicted wound." Owen died at twenty-five, a ghostly presence in the doxology of twentieth-century poetry. The soldiers who survived the war entered T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land,* for the lamps of Europe, the old streetlights, had gone out, and, as Sir Edward Grey predicted, were not lit again for a lifetime. Such cities may not nurture their populations, transient as they are, but are the repositories of imagined futures which may be astounding.

The Layers of a City

There are many city dwellers who walk with their gaze downward. They are not depressed or nearsighted but realize that dogs

are not universally curbed. They are practical minded.

If they did bother to look up they would see a layered landscape, divided roughly among street-level, second-level, mid-level and roof-level structures.

The street level is the most obvious source of entertainment for the pedestrian. However, one must not lose sight of upper levels of buildings, with their symmetries aspiring skyward. One is seeing the landmarks of history and while walking down a street may within one block pass 1986, 1923, 1896, and so forth.

The first step in looking around you is to focus on a building, not on clouds or sky, which can be observed better in an open field. Try to identify with the time the building was erected. Also observe the building's neighbors. They can add to or detract from the presence of a building. Turn your attention to the roof of the building and work down. Is there a symmetry of design, do the windows have presence, or do they look at you blankly? Finally, observe the front entrance. I would prefer the term *door* but many entrances now lack doors, unless they are sliding glass panels or revolving doors. I think that you can establish a rapport with a building by the feel of the door and doorhandle as you enter. This is impossible with sliding and revolving doors. It is like shaking hands with an empty plastic glove.

I used to ask prospective medical students applying at my institution what they would observe if they found themselves on Madison and State streets in Chicago in 1931. This was not necessarily a question related to how well they would be able to practice medicine, but upon their knowledge of history and how they would propose to observe things.

There is, of course, no correct answer. Nonetheless, if I had the opportunity I would be interested in the pace in which people walked, how they lounged at corners, the odors of the street, the sounds of the streetcars and motorcars, and the way buildings looked. More awnings, a more regimented pace, similar clothing in men and in women, universal hats, automobiles also more regimented in appearance, streetcars lined up in file are my imagined observations, based upon old photographs.

One of these observations is how the roofs of automobiles of the

twenties looked like men's caps of the period, just as the roofs of cars of the fifties look like women's hats of that period. As Ring Lardner said, you could look it up.

THE VISION OF A STREET

T. S. Eliot used street imagery frequently: there is a vision of the street which the street hardly understands, half-deserted streets, yellow smoke that slides along the street, grimy scraps of withered leaves and newspapers from vacant lots, a lonely cab-horse steams and stamps, and then the lighting of the lamps, and you heard the sparrows in the gutters, the soul stretched tight across the skies that fade behind a city block, the conscience of a blackened street important to assume the world, twisted faces from the bottom of the street, when evening quickens faintly in the street.

Why are there no starlings over city streets? The reason is the horses, or lack of them. According to J.C. Furnas, in a delightful social history of the early twentieth century, the starlings fed on horse manure. When horses disappeared, so did the starlings. There were advantages to the disappearance of horses. They are no longer ill-treated by the hundreds of thousands, and tetanus is less likely if street dirt enters a wound. For the record, the last horse-drawn street car in New York posed on a Greenwich Village street in 1917.

Streetcars themselves were passé by the thirties and forties, though still abundant. Though they blocked the center of city streets, you knew where they were going, unlike buses, which occasionally lose their way when the busdriver has a memory lapse.

Streetlights are another changing fashion. The lampposts of old were closer to the ground, and emitted less light. There was a neighborliness about them, especially the stanchion which looped downward with filigree patterns and emitted a lone bulb. These lampposts eavesdropped on people's conversations. They are of a different personality compared with the high-arching triple-light supports branching almost into the middle of the street, and are too regal to listen in. There is a sense of loss about the old lampposts. Replicas are sometimes placed in front of trendy hotels. We don't want to forget the past, but keep it in its place, in designated re-creation.

Trees on city streets are not an absolute necessity. Rows of trees may actually be boring, since they obscure the buildings, and keep out what little sunlight is present.

E.B. White, essayist, and one of the consciences of the magazine *The New Yorker* in its earlier years, believed in trees. He wrote two pertinent essays about the city, "Second Tree from the Corner" and a long love letter about the city called "Here Is New York." Both were written in the late 1940's when the United Nations was moving into Midtown and White was concerned about the viability of civilization. He felt that the lone tree symbolized the continuity of the city. In the "Second Tree from the Corner," a city man with bizarre thoughts sees his analyst, who asks him what he really wants. He is not sure, and throws the question back at the analyst. After the catechism of a home in the country, a yacht, and other badges of success have been essayed, the analyst becomes troubled, for he himself cannot really answer the question to his own satisfaction. The man of the bizarre thoughts walks out of the office and sees the rays of the afternoon sun shining on a tree, the second tree from the corner. He realizes that this is what he really wants, the image of such a tree, that no one can bestow. He walks for five blocks before he has another bizarre thought.

White concludes his other essay, "Here Is New York," with a second tree

> . . . an old willow tree in an interior garden, a battered and long-suffering tree held together by strands of wire. It symbolizes the life of the city, under difficulties, growth against odds, sap-rise in the midst of concrete. When I look at it . . . and feel the cold shadow of the planes, I think: "This must be saved, this particular thing, this very tree. If it were to go, all would go—this city, this mischievous and marvelous monument which not to look on would be like death."

A parallel was drawn in a short story by O. Henry fifty years earlier, in which one autumnal leaf remaining on a tree in Greenwich Village was observed by a dying man. The falling of the leaf would have meant his death. The leaf remained affixed to the branch by a band placed by a friend, and so the invalid survived into the winter.

CITIES FUTURE AND PAST

A generation after the Great War, I was fortunate enough to see the City of the Future. One of my early memories was of the World of Tomorrow. This was a special location, the New York World's Fair of 1939. It occurred at a most awkward time in history, just before a second world war. It was built on a marsh which had previously been a dumping ground for garbage. Mountains of garbage and cinders created an eerie landscape. This landscape achieved earlier notoriety in its description by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*.

In a matter of less than three years it was transformed into broad concourses and buildings with color-coded hues. The theme center, a 700-foot-high tapered triangular pylon, and a 200-foot-high perisphere, symbolized two representations of infinity, and, to many who experienced it, has never been matched.

One ascended to the perisphere by a series of long escalators and was swept seated above a large panorama of the city of 1960 by day and by night. Highways were ribbons of perfection, the city provided "an electric assurance of a better life."

I was three years of age and had the great good fortune to be taken into the perisphere, and see the future city as described by H.V. Kaltenborn. There is something to be said about the diction and solemnity of the old radio announcers. They seemed to take themselves much more seriously than our current dual anchors whose chitchat sounds more like "Breakfast with Dorothy and Dick" than the news. In those days it was oracles and pundits, and the events of the day were no laughing matter—indeed, they weren't. Even a speculative exercise of predicting the future of 1960 at a time when war was in the air was a serious matter for HV. He could sell such a plan, as if the revolving audience in the perisphere were a group of investors given a chance of helping to build the Emerald City. Through an abbreviated night and day of fifteen minutes, this city sparkled beneath our feet, with glimmering buildings and arrow-straight highways through which cars sped at over eighty miles an hour. If one looked closely, however, no inhabitants would be found. These cities always work efficiently.

In two recent novels, *Time and Again* and *Time After Time,* the first published in the 1970, the later one just published, Jack Finney describes a contemporary time traveler who gets transported back to an earlier New York, first in 1882, then in 1912. If you read novels actually written in those earlier periods, such as by Edith Wharton or Henry James, there is a sense of acceptance of the environment as orderly and, if I can use this term, *modern.* The time-traveler novels provide considerable description of the strangeness of these times to someone living in our era. I myself have been fascinated with the differences as I pore over photographs from those eras. Aside from the differences in the techniques of photography, there stand out the differences in appearances of the faces, mustaches and beards aside. Perhaps it is the expression in the eyes, or the pose, or outlook, perhaps the acceptance of a more stable if not a more comfortable place in a more ordered society.

I have never traveled backward in time, but I have visited several cities in which I felt palpably the past around me. One of these cities is St. Petersburg. I was there in late June several years ago, in the season of the white nights, after the demise of the Soviet Union. Upon entering the city, I felt as if old dust were clinging to the streets. I have heard the expression "the dust of centuries," but the dust here was of decades. I felt as if I had re-entered the 1940's in some intangible way, although the Leningrad of the 1940's was a far different city, isolated and for years under siege during the war. However, there was a surrealistic familiarity, perhaps created by the clothing, or the old buses or trams, or the way the buildings appeared as if in an etching. I remember a small wine-glass rack inside an old simulated wall-telephone box in my aunt and uncle's apartment in New York. When the receiver was taken off the hook, the small telephone-box cupboard opened, accompanied by a brief, sad, lovely melody of chimes. I thought of this in St. Petersburg, the chimes of the city evoking a subtle message from the past in its lampposts, trams, and long, broad, low-lying bridges that spanned the Neva.

SPACE, SUBWAYS AND ELEVATEDS

Until 1888, London did not have a central city government. The central power resided and continued later to reside in the hands

of landowners, leading to increasing concentration of areas of poverty following rapid transformations of previous sections from construction.

In the nineteenth century, the concept of greater free movement of individuals (but not masses of organized individuals) was developed. London it was that first built the underground or subway, opening up London's center for mass utilization of department stores.

"The subways yawn the quickest promise home." Subways reflect the mythologic past when demons, lost souls, and the Dead inhabited the Underworld. Journeys into the Underworld required daring. New subway lines now open up at the rate of fifty a year. In a fascinating book about subways in history, *Labyrinths of Iron,* by Benson Bobrich, the myth, art, and technology of subways are described.

The idea for the modern subway tunnel presumably came from a French engineer, Marc Isambard Brunel, in the early nineteenth century, who observed in an English dockyard a fragment of boat timber pierced with deep wormholes. He noted the shipworm, *Calamitas patrium,* with its shell-shielded head, grinding through the hard oak. The idea took shape in his mind for a subway.

Antiquity had its road tunnels. In Imperial Rome, Agrippa, advisor to Augustus, built a tunnel linking Avernus with Cumae. This tunnel may have served as Virgil's model for Aeneas's passage into Hades.

In 1809, in London, a "committee of the learned," that is what it was called, sought to determine whether a tunnel under the Thames River was workable. Marc Brunel, observer of wormholes, was funded to develop such a tunnel. He used a cast-iron machine, which he called a shield, divided into augur-like shells that were forced forward with rotary motors by hydraulic presses. The machine provided a mobile backbone to support the tunnel it excavated. Through financial collapse and imprisonment, Brunel persevered. By 1826, three hundred feet of the tunnel was complete.

Over the next eighteen years work progressed despite intense problems such as cave-ins and, according to Brunel, "water from

springs impregnated with poisonous sulfuretted hydrogen gas: The black mud which rolled in spread its foul, noxious, pestilential influence through the tunnel."

On March 25, 1843, the tunnel was officially opened with a Tunnel Waltz marking the occasion. Within fifteen weeks, one million people passed through. The tunnel had been intended for vehicular traffic but for twenty-three years was used as a pedestrian crossing.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, who was a vice-consul in Liverpool, visited the tunnel in 1855. He observed numerous frescoes depicting famous locations around the world decorating the walls of the entry shafts.

He noted that "by day the great tunnel was filled with staffholders, like an underground street market, and enlivened with painting exhibitions, games of chance, and ladies of the night." The tunnel was London's cheapest doss house. The flaring gaslights gave it the appellation "Hades Hotel." Virgil would have relished it.

In 1865, the tunnel was purchased by the East London Railway Company and became part of the London Underground system, and is still in use.

In the United States, subways were opened in Boston in 1897, New York in 1904, and Chicago in 1943.

In New York, the *Tribune* reported the subway opening with its seventy thousand initiates into subterranean travel:

> Men fought, kicked and pummeled one another in their mad dash to reach the subway ticket offices and the trains. Women were dragged out screaming or swooning; grey haired men pleaded for mercy; boys were knocked down. The day was replete with flying wedges of crowds eager to board the trains and others just as eager to debark.

Dante would have relished this.

The tops of the first subway cars were a bright poppy red, and the once ubiquitous wired-glass, cast-iron entrances to the subways, called kiosks, built mostly in the first decade of this century and mostly in Manhattan, existed into the 1960's. The word *kiosk* comes from the Turkish and Persian words for pavilion or portico. These

kiosks protected several generations of subway riders from unexpected downpours because of their enclosed roofs. They were eliminated because they were considered a traffic hazard, presumably because automobiles that might chance onto the sidewalk could not negotiate their way around them.

One of my experiences of déjà vu in Chicago occurs when I drive east on Monroe to Wabash. The Loop El and its stations, and the neon signs of surrounding restaurants, together with the buildings, have a strange resemblance to pictures of Sixth Avenue in New York just before they tore down the El. This was the first Manhattan El to go, in 1938. I have to admit to a certain nostalgia for the late thirties, possibly because I was just coming into consciousness of my surroundings and objects such as lampposts and elevated structures had a special impact for me. A contemporary view of the razing of the Sixth Avenue El, wistful in tone, was provided by E.B. White, writing in *Harper's* magazine.

He describes how he "missed the sound, the spotted shade, its little aerial stations, and the tremor of the thing." And tremor there was. An elevated train stopping in a station sets up a series of decreasing but discrete horizontal vibrations, which cannot be reproduced by any other form of transportation. The station shakes, the passengers shake in harmony. The Sixth Avenue El also looped around the entertainment section of Manhattan, going west at 53rd Street to meet the Ninth Avenue line and head north. This "heavenly railroad, swinging implausibly in the air," to quote White, was a perverse influence to the industrious. He describes how easy it was for him to wander up the cardiac climb and stand in the open-air vestibule of a car, being conveyed to the ocean breezes of South Ferry, and through the lofts of Greenwich Village. This is the line that took the stockbrokers to the Polo Grounds in special cars. The El in olden times in New York was the railroad of the elite, according to White, financial giants riding elegantly from Wall Street to their homes. We cannot take this statement too seriously, although the El one summer in the late 1890's had a special bicycle car for those who wished to ride around South Ferry.

Yes, the stockbrokers' specials did ride up to the Polo Grounds. The Giants games began at 4 P.M., a reasonable time after the stock

market closed to get up to the game. We are talking of the era of John McGraw, before and during Prohibition.

If you were a Wall Streeter, you had your own tacitly reserved El car, for you and the crowd that surged into the Rector Street station a little after 3 P.M. The Sixth Avenue express wove through the heart of downtown, making several turns to keep the trip interesting, over the Greenwich Village of Villard and early O'Neill, curving into Sixth Avenue then up through the women's shopping mile, long gone, past the Tenderloin, straight through Herald Square where Stuff and Guff tolled the hours, past the old Herald Building, past Bryant Park, the Hippodrome, the Algonquin, the clubs and the brownstones of the forties, curving again as it entered 53rd Street and avoiding the park to sweep into the Ninth Avenue El, and rush as an express past the old West Side brownstones and the Museum of Natural History, past the storage warehouses of the sixties, climbing upward to 110th Street for the final daredevil curve, where you would hear the angels sing, staying high over the buildings in Harlem, the Harlem of the Negro Renaissance, until it reached McGraw's Polo Grounds. It was McGraw's Polo Grounds between 1902 and 1932 but the stockbrokers began to lose interest after 1929. This long ride, sometimes punctuated by surreptitious sips of bootleg gin during Prohibition, ended in the horseshoe-shaped field which had never been used for Polo, and fitted comfortably below Coogan's Bluff, which once allowed excellent visibility of the outfield for the cognoscenti who appreciated Burns and Snodgrass and Josh De Vore. Although the games began at 4 P.M., they were remarkably fast then. The shortest major league nine-inning game ever played was in the Polo Grounds in 1919, fifty-four minutes.

A guide to New York (1939) describes the elevated lines in the elegance of their "rambling trajectories, images of skyscrapers at dusk, glittering rivers, and dwindling streets."

Dusk is a special time in the city, especially on clear cold evenings, which at the turn of the century, in East Coast cities, was termed "the blue hour." This referred to the deep indigo of the sky, with its translucence, that is rarely seen, but once seen, is remembered forever. I myself remember a night in late 1949, look-

ing west on 57th Street in Manhattan at just such an hour, the first stars appearing, and the skylarks circling above me. For me, the magic hour is always 5 P.M. of such a winter night, with the anticipation of the subtle visions of night.

OF TIME AND THE RIVER

The park draws its crowds, but the riverfront does as well. An example of the use of space to bring people together for an experience is South Seaport, in lower Manhattan. This area, just below Brooklyn Bridge, used to be a heavily commercial area of low buildings dealing in fresh fish. Before daybreak, tons of fish were unloaded from trawlers and from refrigerated trucks from New England and New Jersey. For six days a week, from 2 A.M. to 9 A.M., the packing, deboning, and cleaning of the fish were attended to with single-minded vigilance. It was a great place to get a meal at 5 A.M. In 1936, one section of the market had the bad fortune of collapsing. New buildings were planned. This was the beginning of the end for the Fulton Fish Market. Planning and replanning has led to an open space for congregating, a series of restored buildings, numerous restaurants purveying sea food, but no place to get a meal at five in the morning. In Salem and Boston, old wharves and warehouses are also converted into condominiums, taverns, and restaurants. To quote a contemporary lament on such transformations, "The waterfront died the day you couldn't get breakfast at 5 A.M."

Walt Whitman had occasion to use the Ferry that wended its way from Brooklyn Heights across the East River to a landing just above the Fulton Fish Market. He recorded his perceptions on viewing the mid-nineteenth-century city and transported these perceptions into the future:

> . . . it avails not, time nor place avails not . . . I am with you, you men and women of a generation, I too many and many a time crossed the rivers of old. . . .

The future replied to Whitman in the form of the poet Allan Ginsburg.

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys. . . . Will we walk all night through solitary streets? Ah, dear father graybeard . . . what America did you leave when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of the Lethe?

I did not have a chance to cross the Fulton Ferry, which evolved from a rowboat crossing in 1642 and which may have been further developed for commerce in the late eighteenth century by John Jacob Astor before he began fur trapping. Nonetheless, I have examined photographs and etchings of the period, with their forests of tall masts on the waterfront, just south of what would become the Brooklyn Bridge. I have my own response to Whitman:

At Fulton Street in Response to Whitman

How long and often I have seen in the light
Of sunsets gleaming on the waters,
The vanished mists of ferries bearing the shades of men
Who walked through shaded streets under flickering lamps,
The barks of ships with full rigging floating
Soft upon the sunbeam daring waters,
The scurrying of men who, a century before,
Walked the gray and shadowy streets.
He calls the future from limpid days,
Beyond the lilacs and painted ships
That ply the gleaming river, city to city,
The spires of churches fill the scene with
Heaven-pointed clarions above the wooded wharves,
Starlings arc over the shadowed eaves while
Masts of ships arc gently
In the lowering sky.
Yes. I have heard the voice above the
New-made spires and the twisting streets,
Have felt the spirit soar above the long-gone steamers,
Beyond the El trains winding their way

> Tortuous above Coenties Slip,
> Have waited for an answer
> To a question woven of seaweeds and kelp.

The starlings, of course, are "fled with the horses from the fields of grace."

THE FACE OF THE APOCALYPSE

When I was twelve, around a campfire, I heard a story which haunted me for years. It was about the "son of a priest who heard of the Dead Places in the east."

> It was forbidden to cross the great river and look upon the Place of the Gods. The priest's son journeyed to the Dead Place beyond the river. He came to the Place of the Gods, which had been destroyed at the time of the great burning. He approached the city of the Gods by a raft through swirling waters. It was a city of broken towers, the bases of stone carved with cut-letters including UBTREAS and below a shattered image of a god, the name of ASHING. As darkness fell, circles of light became torches, and the gods emerged, on foot and in chariots, the great vines of bridges were mended, and a vision of the great city as it used to be became burnished in his mind.

The story referred to a dead New York after a conflagration. I heard this story sitting around a campfire with other campers in Connecticut. At that time, 1948, the year of E.B. White's lone willow tree essay, there was great concern about a nuclear apocalypse. Such stories of great cities destroyed and the mysteries of earlier civilizations have always been attractive. I remembered the story for decades, but it was not until several years ago when by chance I received a copy of the story that I learned that it was entitled "By the Waters of Babylon," by Stephen Vincent Benet. Since Benet died in 1937, he had no way of knowing about nuclear holocausts, but this poet, who died young, seemed to have an interest in falling or dead cities.

PRESERVATION AND DESTRUCTION

Buildings creep back from the street line, the wall barrier and plaza have replaced the streetfront line of buildings in many con-

temporary projects. Streets become plazas, or terraces, and it is no longer easy to locate the entrance to a massive slab of a building.

Intricate city streets are now bypassed by aerial highways. In Boston, a major artery, called, in fact, the Central Artery, has swept through the old city, cutting a swath through buildings and streets like a marauder.

There is concern by many about destruction of old buildings, and increasingly, many buildings that previously would have been demolished without thought in order to build a massive concrete slab or a parking lot are now on the list for historic preservation.

What should be considered criteria for such preservation? I am not aware of the criteria in various cities, but I have prepared a list of my own standards. For one, transporting a building to another location or transplanting the part of an edifice onto another is not my idea of preservation. The building, if worth preserving, relates to the site in which it was built. I am not sure that an ordinary building in which there has been a great historic event is worth preserving. The building was incidental to the event. The fact that George Washington slept in the building is also questionable as a reason for preservation. Stage carriages, horse skeletons and chamber pots might be preserved for similar reasons.

I do not relish transplantation and miniaturization of architecture. The old grandstand overhang of Yankee Stadium was destroyed with remodelling in the mid-seventies, and a replica was placed over the farthest bleachers. This reminds me in some ways of the displacement of telephone numbers. EVERGREEN 6-2274 becomes 386-2274 then 386-CASH. Somehow, the balance is lost.

Conclusion

Finally, what of Chicago? Perhaps its own past lingers in the shadows of its rookeries. If you walk on Michigan Avenue, with a little concentration and the help of the moon and dim, dishevelled stars, you may just barely see the pyramid roof and the statue of Progress atop the Montgomery Ward Building, the long bar of the Auditorium Building, and the Auditorium tower, where Sarah Bernhardt proclaimed the city "the pulse of America."

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