

PART IV

The Trailing Consequence: A Triptych

I *Journey Home*

The picture show, three-and-a-half hours of it,
Was over;
the credits, so many
ascended into immortality.

The fiery art of film
had sent my head buzzing—:
I rose in penumbra, vexed at the unwinding
course of truth and was now lost in my steps,
eyes struggling with unnatural chasms of light.
I walked home for a long time
and in my mind I regarded
the tall screen bearing down on me—
I was drifting away
from its outburst, yet its measure of violence,
like an indictment from Sarge,
did not fade.

There was no wind.
No firm star came out
to acquire me in safety.
The world seemed enormous around me
and as I moved in it
I felt I could not journey
further than myself.

Minutes passed
and then another
(Once I saw, as in a dream,
that I Had never reached home.)
I crossed the railroad tracks, went past
the lumber yard, the concrete bridge at Purgatory Creek,
and over a second set of tracks—
a weary logic leading me back to where I began.
I think I must have made a fist
in desperation, as tough as the years
to my name

and there grew in my mouth
a great shout which never came.

Time and time over: a child at that age
falls short of endowing dumb misery with speech.

II

Observer and Observed

No one walks with me
(down the dust-bound street
Where I step lightly)
Sullen, slight-young boy.
Each neighbor
in the ease of the afternoon
serenely grown out of something forgetful,
looks through me,
believing life goes on as before
as I pass by.

The trees and the houses among them
see me staring in muteness;
from where they stand—houses, trees,
neighbors—they cannot know
the sudden intake of all breath,
a sigh I myself do not comprehend.

Something weightless
gathers around me, while my body, unpoised
holds its forward momentum
in silence and slow time.

As the afternoon emptied of meaning

Deepens perceptibly,

the soft-hollowed steps in which I move
are my only cause.

III

Dusk with Dreaming

The neighborhood, 1956—:
I reached its border
feeling I was nothing
other than my name.
It seems a long time ago

that I stepped into the patio
held off for a moment
before going in for supper
and leaned, instead,
against a pecan tree's
slender-rooted trunk.
And standing at my point of view,
I felt a nothingness
burning through all thought.

By now the day was fading into twilight,
and I beginning
not to cast a shadow where I had always been,
when I saw,
suddenly, a boy alone
who had to tear to prove he was...
Something from the movie screen had
dropped into life, his small shield of faith
no longer with him.

Dusk was dawning over the tree-tops
when I was called inside
where grace was said, I am sure of it,
for we were always grateful to the sky.
I remember the clock ticking

and my breathing

when finally

my mouth took ethnically again
sustenance in solace.
The rest of me began to dream and my mind
flew off and I became, for that instant:

another boy from another land, in another time,
another time, which is also home.