

Secret, serene, she dwells in a sealed space
Where vague gold shapes, like symbols, mystify
A simple ground of blue.

I am the child in whose heart's history
She keeps her fateful share.

And she?
She is The Lady with Azure Hair.

Triptych

For Beatrice Bartlett

I
An Illustration by Attilio Mussino in *The Adventures
of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi

I turn another page—and am swept deep
Into the labyrinth of remembered days.
A portrait in dim blues and grays,
The head shown sideways, like a cameo.
A delicate headdress
Of sheerest lawn, gold-flecked, trails down
Upon the bosom of her pale blue gown.
A clasp holds back beside her brow
A single heavy tress
Whose curving fall is highlighted in blue.

Hers is the face that once bent low
Above the child half-sentient, half-asleep.

Commissioned by the Alpha chapter of Phi Beta Kappa
at Yale and read at the annual banquet of the chapter
in March 1998.

II

Coastal scene, Isle of Arran, an oil painting by Alphonse Shelton

The sun has set. Beyond a stark
 Skyline of somber hills, colors that glowed
 On banks of cloud fade into brown and gray.
 Across the stretch of land that skirts the bay
 A rough road runs aslant, then leads away
 In turnings left and right.

Some distance on, a cart trundles its load;
 A figure plods before—dark shapes the painter's brush
 Sets indistinct against dull rock and bush
 No longer green.

Earth, sea and sky: all things within the scene
 Foretell the full dominion of the dark;
 Only, upon the utmost height
 Of the far hills toward which they climb,
 A single steady light
 Directs day laborers homeward in due time.

III

Winter landscape, painting by Lu Chih (Ming dynasty)

Crowded within the tall frame's narrow space,
 Softened by snows of creamy gray,
 The mountain's shouldering ramparts, tier on tier,
 Tower into snow-gray sky.

Descending

From its celestial vantage-point, the eye
 Follows the slanting plane
 Of the cliff-guarded summit past a lane
 Of stunted trees, veers sharply back
 On more precipitous terrain
 Where pillowy banks and boulders, by **degrees**,
 Mark off the downward track,
 Ascends a mounded overlook,
 Then plummets deep
 Down a ravine, shadowed beside the steep,
 Completes its headlong course and meets a **frozen brook**.

Seen last of all,
 Trees in a miniature grove,
 Drawn fine with strokes of gray,
 Lift traceries of branch and twig above
 A frail pavilion whose wide-windowed wall
 Detains the winter day.
 A scholar centuries old is seated there.

Steadfast beneath the stare
 Of those inhuman heights,
 He dips his brush and writes
 A poem's first character.