

November 22, 1963—and After

By Marden J. Clark

It's the same country I step out into this afternoon:
Thanksgiving haze still discourages the sun;
The chill that has already seized flowers and fruit
Still crisps my cheeks and hands.
Still I walk on ordered walks past ordered lawns and homes.

I had thought to find it all changed,
Even the sun suspended in some awful parenthesis
And darkness everywhere.

But no. Still slants the sun through that thanksgiving haze.
Still falls the rain over Chicago streets,
Still falls the roar
Above the Dallas crowds.
Still fall three rounds still trying to make report
Of another setting star.
But no lilacs till spring, no thrush to sing,
To sing me meaning in death.

The right! all cried. But no, one of the left, alone.
The universe at opposite poles turns in upon itself,
Hate arcs the chasm
Closes the circle in a new Inferno,
Throws sparks which trace a leaden path.
And he is gone.

It's the same world I walk out into this afternoon.
The thanksgiving haze still defines the sun.
Those ordered walks and lawns and homes
Still define my town.

But Satan has shifted his haunches down there
(Even Satan is scorched by the heat of this hate).
The embedding ice groans, the universe moans,
Its moorings jarred by the shock.

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Hate pierces, leaving torn ragged flesh. But it sears.
We feel the cut and tear, the wound gapes.
But the sear has already staunched its flow.
The horror clings, the dumb grief like December's last fly.
Dante rode Virgil's back down those mighty haunches
Through the ice past zero gravity of being
And began the purgatorial climb.
We might make the same journey
With inverted boots and an empty saddle
On a riderless black stallion—the same journey,
Alongside seven whites marching with death.

Maybe he can—not atone for us (that was His)—
But help us to know the atonal truth:
That no one, not even He, can finally atone for us.
That is ours.

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