

Louis Simpson

(1923- )

In California (1963)

Here I am, troubling the dream coast  
With my New York face,  
Bearing among the realtors  
And tennis-players my dark preoccupation.

There once was an epical clatter--  
Voices and banjos, Tennessee, Ohio,  
Rising like incense in the sight of heaven.  
Today, there is an angel in the gate.

Lie back, Walt Whitman,  
There, on the fabulous raft with the King and the Duke!  
For the white row of the Marina  
Faces the Rock. Turn round the wagons here.

Lie back! We cannot bear  
The stars any more, those infinite spaces.  
Let the realtors divide the mountain,  
For they have already subdivided the valley.

Rectangular city blocks astonished  
Herodotus in Babylon,  
Cortez in Tenochtitlan,  
And here's the same old city-planner, death.

We cannot turn or stay,  
For though we sleep, and let the reins fall slack,  
The great cloud-wagons move  
Outward still, dreaming of a Pacific.