

Howard Nemerov

(1920-1991)

Style (1967)

Flaubert wanted to write a novel
About nothing. It was to have no subject
And be sustained upon style alone,
Like the Holy Ghost cruising above
The abyss, or like the little animals
In Disney cartoons who stand upon a branch
That breaks, but do not fall
Till they look down. He never wrote that novel,
And neither did he write another one
That would have been called *La Spirale*,
Wherein the hero's fortunes were to rise
In dreams, while his waking life disintegrated.

Even so, for these two books
We thank the master. They can be read,
With difficulty, in the spirit alone,
Are not so wholly lost as certain works
Burned at Alexandria, flooded at Florence,
And are never taught at universities.
Moreover, they are not deformed by style,
That fire that eats what it illuminates.