

1970

# Upon Leaving My Teacher

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UPON LEAVING  
MY TEACHER

*for Donald Justice*

1

The clerks are jealous  
Over their places.  
It's Saturday.

It's Sunday; they  
Sit, nevertheless,  
High upon their stools:

White shirts, white faces.  
The lamps become dull.  
They are patiently

Waiting to copy.  
Their quills tremble.  
Each of them stammers,

Remembering, with  
His small conceits,  
The master's examples.

2

There is upon him  
The look of a Jew  
Leaving his ghetto,

One of the dark ones,  
Inevitably  
Drawing attention

At the first corner  
Perhaps, one whose papers  
Are not in order—

The very papers  
For which he had so  
Patiently waited—

And who must wait now,  
Watching the others  
As they pass safely.

3

The children appear,  
The bearded children—  
So many of us

Aloft and drifting  
Back, on our crisp  
Little parachutes.

How gently we come  
To the feet of  
The one who summons us.

We choose up sides.  
One by one we're chosen.  
The evening rises

Out of the grass, slowly.  
It's dark, there's no one  
Calling us home.

4

Our wives grow uneasy.  
They gather the lengths  
Of our empty silence.

What can we say,  
Now that we do not  
Know what to think?

We meet in hotels.  
We meet like the sons  
Of two marriages

Upon the father's  
Death—distant, oddly  
Repeating ourselves:

Who will abuse us  
With the precision  
Of self-abuse?