

1971

# Litany

Stephen Dobyns

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## LITANY

Wherever we go, we must go in darkness.  
We have eaten our candles. Cattle must always  
be accepted. They are useless and as benign  
as Christmas. Rats are hated not for their faults,  
which are ours, but because they are consistent  
in our virtues. In the cellars of misers  
each rat is a hero. I shall be such a hero  
with a black wagon and bell, walking the streets  
and accepting the living. We read of directions  
in books. I know of roads that shut down at night,  
go off on their own explorations.  
They are modest and no super highways  
are among them. Bite into an apple  
and a small voice shouts hello. Be respectful  
to your food. Run down the street shouting  
and everyone shuts their doors. Join them  
in darkness. On the roads we have taken,  
cities are the last stages of the cattles' journey.  
Chicago welcomes their conventions. The right roads  
will discover my humility, tell me their secrets.  
Eventually, when people reach Chicago after years  
of darkness, cattle will drive wagons with streamers  
and favors. Avoiding the occasion, I will go north  
with a road in Wyoming. It will tell early stories.  
Each step will brighten toward the sun.