

Self-Portrait

If you paint or write
with the right hand,
the right cheek comes forward,
the left eye assumes a modest shadow
like the blind behind which
a watcher scans the street.
And that retiring side of the face
is thinner, a backing for
the nose butting a line of shade
that ends in tangled darkness
above the mouth's assertion.
Contre jour one side of the jaw
is a knife-blade on the light
and the other earlobe features
as jewel in its own right.

I am watching my eyes watch back,
wary of the written portrait.
They would like a lace curtain
to look out from, a veil
to blunt the cutting edge of cheek.
My mouth is closed over teeth
clenched to prevent the escape
of some verbal revelation.
There are all sorts of small shadows
which linger in lines between
the brows, between lips and chin,
then shift uneasily under
my pen's scrutiny. I usually
lift my mouth for the mirror.
That would be forgery now.