

II.

War Dreams Itself

The sky is rent with wires—It is no wonder a man cannot think—The city is—whispering—
locust sounds—No wonder I dream a stranger's voice—One cranes one's neck and sees the sun
—lacerated—drawn open—A wire can be pulled taut—and through—a man's neck—before it is
impeded by the spine—while the vital fluid—sprays the walls—even the ceiling—

—a mechanism—horseless—will—

They will butcher horses in the streets—hack open their necks—shoot them between the eyes—
blood melts the snow and—meat piles—steaming—There are moments—wherein one perceives
their fate—

Perhaps—For so long I believed this the—sound of my voice—

Are you the man come to bring oblivion—

Did a dead god dream you—open a mouth crimson and you climbed free—

It is true—I no longer sleep for when I close my eyes a—vision singular—appears—A room
much like this room—Yet it is not—

Through windows—an illume—No, lightless—

Somewhere in this room stand—bodies—shadows--perhaps—They speak—There are moments
in this room—I know I am not myself—For—years—I have watched them—enter our gate—
come a thousand miles to tour our facilities—Men—bearded—freshly shaven—suits—
watchchains—bankers--speculators--doctors--politicians—Schoolmarms—children—

They perceive clouds of smoke—the fumes blacken—They cover their noses with handkerchiefs
—I have watched men vomit at the smell—There is no shame—it is a natural reaction to an air
of—

Of course the air is pungent—moist with blood and shit—lard burning—It is true, what they say
 —the rivers have run red—bubbled with fat and offal—
 —rushed to slaughter—there is a beauty in the confused parade—The hogs—delicate brutes—
 are cooled first—boys rub their flanks with chilled water—for fear of a—meat fevered—

Do they know—Every motion—alien and strange—the very air—fecund with murder—

The killing floor itself—you see here the world made new—the mechanical liberation of life
 from flesh—the spirit flees in terror—spews forth in the blood—7500 hogs a day—We must take
 great care—the slightest bruise will devalue the meat—

Here a boychild fastens the chain to the hog's ankle—the wheel turns—What awful motion—a
 three hundred pound hog torn from the ground—screaming—The sticker's easy movement—like
 a machine himself—within a vast mechanical organism—and the blood is freed—torrents spray
 —

The hog is no more—already the wheel progresses—a new hog screams—darkness then—and
 again—and again—The constant tide—of scream and flesh—tide of beast split in twain—viscera
 removed—clumps of gut and organ—glistening—

—boychildren sweep blood clots—sawdust—meatfilth—into gutters—

The sticker punctures--punctures—Slopped in blood--gore—It loses all meaning—These are motions he carries out in his sleep—There is only the task—He and his fellows—a thousand in unison—They do not slow until it is all dead—

The body itself—the sacred human body—its cock and tongue and fingers—heartbeat and lungs
—is no more than a mechanism of fluid and atom—a machine constructed by a dead god to—
murder and shit—to create murder devices to set his task more leisurely—

—the more we murder—the more we must create—Flesh grown from other flesh—come and
blood—microbes—congealing and blossoming—The fruit moans into the world—slick with filth
and skin—wild matted hair—The thing itself is blind—totters—Eyes and veins—teeth—brutish
—dullwitted—They outnumber us by the millions—

How quickly we brutalize them into nothing—how quickly they revive—

It continues—even in the still night—even in a universe silent and asleep—a rhythm other
pressed into—The creatures—perhaps their souls—spirits—spasming—shitting and baying—
The shriek of awareness—and some—rough dead sound—a mallet punishes a skull—groaning
chains—The mechanism proceeds—

There are moments—when one's destiny does—

Clara alone is here—

I discovered you--I tell her—In the Exchange Building she sat—one amidst a thousand women--
their typing machines—stiff mechanical clatter—I pulled you from the filth--I say—

It is not a courtship—something far more momentous holds us together—

Come--I told her one afternoon—I will show you the floor—That first day—we did not yet
speak openly—I did not yet say--If only we could freeze the moment when the spirit flees—Its
eyes—the flesh itself—when a hog becomes a carcass—and yet not—

I did not yet say--We live in a place beyond their screams—yet we long to--dwell within—

They sound almost human--she said—and she did not look away—No I have never seen her not
in command—

She once told me she is from St Louis—the daughter of a pharmacist—She fled on a steamship
—smoke—Men—their hats—rumped suits—linen—Ladies at the railing—Vagrants—
wandering the waters—I close my eyes—Clara—a child amidst the sickened—panorama—Were
you terrified I ask—Terror is—she began and then—I could no more bear them was all she
would say—Another day she tells me she was—married in Texas—A burnt land—cattle—the
skulls of cattle—He was a rancher perhaps—Where is this husband now I ask—What if I said I
killed him—Was he a drunk I ask—a lout—Would that make it better—I shrug—Perhaps—What
if I told you he was a kind man—timid—Gave children sweets—wept to see a deer shot—and
opened—What if I told you I cut his throat while he slept—out of pity—disgust—

We were not yet open—exposed—when—

I came here because of death--Clara wrote—The air—seems curdled—putrid—

Her hand falls onto my lap—I remove it—I will be your lover she whispers—I say nothing—I do not even look at her—My throat is full of blood—heat—How she laughs—Perhaps she believes she has shocked me—Later she will insist the wine got the better of her—But I will remember she has had no wine—

I am not always here--I tell myself—I am not always myself—

There is a man who speaks for me—walks—Who carries out my tasks--instructs underlings—At night he slips into my skull—swells into my skin—

No—I am not myself—I am not here—

Clara alone is—crouched in my velvet chair—Her great book of appointments and tasks—

She is saying something I cannot hear—Perhaps the anarchists have finally come to kill us—

Now the barber tilts me back—His mustache waxed and—white vest—soap and brush—razor
and—How slender he is—assured—To Clara he speaks pleasantly—a storm later today--
perhaps--he says—His lips red—bright—blood to the surface—swelled—I watch him speak—
his tongue and teeth—How warm his breath—Beneath his apron—one cannot tell—perhaps
unclothed he—I close my eyes—How easily he could split me open—

There are rooms where meat hangs spread like wings—A flesh—embalmed—

Some men long to wander there—amidst a thousand carcasses—suspended against decay—They
have never seen anything--so grand—

In this city I have built--I sometimes think—time—the body—do not function as they should—

I have made something new of it all—

If not for Clara I would never leave—She is always costuming me in some manner or other—
 Dress coat and black tie—for the theater—dinners—in the light of day—Short coat and top hat
 perhaps—the museum—Perhaps a thousand years from now we too—our great works and skulls
 —The city square and market—carrots--chickens—The vile human swarm—They say Chicago
 is a city alive--thriving—The future—I see only those death has not yet assaulted—ludicrous—
 the universe will soon blot them out—Perhaps we attend a ballet now—she leans to me—
 whispers—She finds it beautiful—No it is foul—obscene—I want to scream—Fill the room with
 ether I thought—and bolt the doors—I thrust my fist into my mouth—bite until the blood—
 There is laughter somewhere—O god it is monstrous—

If not for her—Anything I need exists already in my city—meat and wine—barbers and soap—
 doctors—tinctures--sweet ether—pills—

Black the windows--I will say—I don't care how—Blinds are not enough—See how the sun
 seeps through—

Tar the windows--I cry—the fumes will drive my fever—My hand barely visible before my eyes
 —A sofa burning for a torch—A haze throttles the world—

A thousand years hence they might pry my carcass free—leatherbrown—hollowed of organ—
 Tack me to some university wall—A hideous specimen they might say—how many do you think
 he killed—

Clara tells me—The family she was born into—swollen with—brothers and sisters—a cousin perhaps—her parents both—a grandmother—

The old woman called them by the names of her dead—Her grandfather killed in the revolution—a ball tore his arm off—Bled out in a cornfield—Yet she saw him in my father's face--Clara said—At all hours she wandered from the house—They found her in the public park—staring at the trees—They found her ankle deep in mud—before the river—Perhaps she would have drowned in waters—gray and foaming—Her body discovered a dozen miles later—by fish consumed—a woman no more—Instead--the attic room they locked her in—How easily one is forgotten in the darkness—I was to feed her—lantern light—spoon by spoon—milk—broth—porridge—I made her jaw to chew—Sang her little songs one sings to an infant—The rag doll I brought her—she cradled now to her breast—Her blue eyes dimmed—her chin—the frail white whiskers—The body decays I thought and hair trembles forth like—a potato sprouted—I longed to pluck them--Clara said--but the old woman screamed—

She'd forgotten how to speak—She believed the shadows upon the walls—the world itself—I pressed my ear to the attic door—her moans and cries—I was only 11 or 12 but I thought—

When I was a child—a very young child—she held me—whispered to me I was a pretty girl—It was cruel to not kill her then—Clara said—

Did you want to--I do not ask Clara—Did the attic have a window--I could have said—they would have found her tangled in a bush—

—a pillow, I did not say—an old woman can only struggle so long—no one suspects a child—In
the morning the windows are opened—Already the clamor below—

Each day our city becomes ever more infested with life--I tell Clara—The degraded races here
congeal—Germans—Swedes—Poles—

I have no sense for their language—strange, guttural—No, I understand them not—

Their wooden homes—Window to window—trousers, shirts, gowns from lines suspended—
ghostly white—buckling in the wind—Children in rags—boots and hats—crouch watching—
soot—bricks—dust of bricks—wagon tracks in mud—mud alleyways—

Lovely older boys—their ragged trousers held up by fingers through loopholes crooked—sulking
in the ruin—

—cabbages fester—newspapers with blood—strewn—shit and slop—

The young man upon his cot—his hair matted—blistered lips—he is wheezing yet—His friend
stands in the corner—his coat and hat and the wind rocking through the windowpanes—How his
eyes glow—In the doorway—a wretched mother and infant suckling—In the alleyway—perhaps
the father—a shape half-frozen—blue—the frost pale alleyway dirt—eyes swollen—his lips—

Another room—the little girl—Perhaps 12—14—Een she does not know—Cadaverous—her
sunken eyes and cheeks—bones of wrist and arm—Soot and rags—Her belly is swollen—She
tells me her family sleeps on the same straw pallet—While the others sleep her father—perhaps

her brother—She tells me it is impossible to know—They are so alike at night—pulling her
closer—

If not for you—I do not tell Clara—I would drink carbolic acid—They will find me in my own
shit and piss—a husk swollen—They must not preserve me—I do not tell Clara—Even as a
carcass—pickled or smoked—I want—no more this—tedium—Theaters and opera houses—
Hotels—gold leaf—marble—Corinthian columns—Hot and cold water of course—Elevators of
such speed—cafes and shops—saloons—It will be the greatest city in the world--I have said—
How unrelenting—the days followed by more days—It is all the same—Someday—What wind
drones through streets—timber laden—A howl—devours us—Finally—I thought—nothing will
remain—

There are many rooms—only I have seen—Windowless yet—children lie—blue in the
moonlight—Limbs tangled—bone tears through—blood black—Some faces—a mouth—
toothless—Soon—the eyes too—Boys—smutty faced—pouty—lewd—I have seen them in the
war—masquerading as men—frail mustaches as if—pencil etched—They too may kill—some
are shot through the neck—I have crouched to watch—their mouths bubble—Others—the arm
explodes—

There is no such thing as innocence I have thought—ants and flies make their nests—I will build
 such a tower I thought—mold and slime and bone—None but I may look upon—A child swollen
 —I begin telling Clara—while she—washes my brow—a cold cloth—

The doctor brings—His lamp of glass—and inside a sponge—soaked—Breathe deeply--he says
 —Now the vapor until—

Finally again—the languor—I am here—I said—possessed of my full senses—I could stand if I
 wanted to—I could read any text you place in front of me—My dear doctor you could stab me
 now and I would feel nothing—

My body rings as if—a bell struck—

I will tear my mind open—I do not say—until the dead god stands before me—I will recognize it
 is him for he alone knows my name—

If I were a man—Clara whispers—If I shear my hair—bind my breasts—But not too stout—
 manly—No I abhor the word—The concept is—foul—I prefer—a man—she says—yet not a
 man—My perfume and frock coat—embellished—a pocket square—a cravat—My buttonhole—
 a lily—My boots of—patent leather—

She covers my eyes—there in the darkness—she stands—

What would you do with me—she asks—Would you peel me open—Tender—hairless and lithe
—My—lips—asshole—My neither this nor that—Would I drive you mad—

If not for Clara—I would never leave—In the carriage—Clara’s cigarettes—the blue perfumed smoke—Now the Palmer—hotel saloon—here boys dart with telegrams—Travelers—men of business—esteemed so-called—spitting tobacco—their ceaseless money yammer—A fellow stumbles to us—drunk although it is not yet noon—He brays—What an astonishing city this is— Beside us—the urchin we acquired on the street—a rough lad—Clara opens her cigarette tin for him—The waiter brings the boy whisky and soda—The child—regards us warily—He tells us his name is Samuel—later—he does not respond when I so address him—He is a cunning animal--I thought—Soon his thin vulgar mouth—slurs—His pale cheeks—blood ruddied—Now we feed him—whisky alone—Clara takes his hand—Such a lovely boy she tells him—He does not pull away—His eyes—loll—I agree I say—I own this building I tell him—and many others like it—There are rooms only I have seen—But I will show you—

If you were a lovely boy—I tell Clara—slowly without pause—I would lock you in a room—
furnished with only a mattress of straw—At night—by the light of a candle—I would watch your
body—rise and fall—listening until—The anxiety—burns and swells—Beautiful lad—

Hips—slight—the smooth bones—your rosey—Your face so still it might never again move—

I have always found the sex impulse a curse--I tell her—In animals it is as if a madness overtakes
them—you have seen it—For me it is the same—The seed burns and burns—until it is—
expunged—

This room—a table and white cloth—places set for three—The boy's mouth—fat with steak—
his plate pooled—a fluid—pink—I have so long considered this moment—perhaps it has already
happened—

How he flails—thin mewes—sputter—Hold him fast--I tell Clara—Black blood—clots her hair—
the table cloth—swollen red—The very atmosphere—sopping with iron—I too—this baptism—

Don't let him close his eyes I shout—Her voice somewhere—How long I have awaited this
moment—I gaze and gaze until there is nothing more—

I follow him through the thicket—Dead grass and—This brute I thought—wild stink and heat—
How many men has he murdered—rebel women chased down in fields—The months have
ravaged him—Dysentery and the droning empty hours—But I see what he was—Ruddy neck—
pale body—muscle knotted—dense black hair—How he would pummel me into the mud I
thought—

Yet some days—I do not leave—Perhaps I allow Clara bring a tray—The stench—nauseates—
ham—fat dappled—eggs—a sauce—crimson—This tedium—cutting and chewing—This show
fascination—Yes quite good I might say—Even in solitude there are tasks—one cannot avoid—
the body will not permit it—What is man but a mechanism—shackled to its organs—constructed
to consume—expunge—Perhaps I allow a lamp lit—Perhaps—Clara may speak of the weather I
cannot see—No—I can bear only silence—No some days even Clara must not enter—She calls
to me through the door—Are you unwell—Shall I bring the doctor—laudanum—Her voice is—a
knife through my skull—Leave me alone—I whisper from my great velvet chair—No more—

There are too many people—I do not tell Clara—Too many eyes—Their voices—sniveling
sounds—How can they tolerate their own thoughts—I do not understand a man who has not
longed for—annihilation—I do not tell Clara—I believed the war would—cull the herd—We
leave them bayonet cleaved—rib bone and entrails—Others—as if angels dreaming--lips
flowered—red—Your are better this way—I whisper to them—We burn Atlanta to nothingness
—Women and children flee—weeping and sooty—a caravan sluggish—We should have
followed on horseback—I do not tell Clara—Bayonets—I do not say—Our bare hands—

Leave—I tell Clara—Never again enter this room—The boy—sprawled—He is beautiful—
flowered—his eyes yet—spread—With my fingers—now my tongue—I touch his cheek—His
lips—of salt and iron—

By the wrists I pull him to the wall—how immovable his new weight—The bones wrench free
but the skin holds—

How quiet he lies—slumped—I could reach into his throat—to my wrist—now the elbow—My
body entire—

Even now he is—transforming—none but I can bear what he will become—

Soon no scrubbing will remove his stain—

Had I been killed in the war—cloud of blood and earth—what was my arm—scattered—bone
splinter—Surgeons flung arms and legs from hospital windows—heap of meat and flies—
Perhaps I lie tangled there—

My father—Clara says—wrote home from—between marches—swamps—fields—Tents—
malaise—We read his first letters—aloud—Winter evenings—candle light—Mother wept behind
—a door closed—

Then—we heard no more—Clara says—Lincoln was shot and dead—and buried—yet—of
Father—nothing—The thought of him moldering—anonymous—a skull to be discovered and
displayed in a thousand years—like a Roman vase—

Perhaps—he fled—Men disappeared in such ways—I say—For all you know he is—living in—
Texas somewhere—California—No—she laughs—Not that man—

Perhaps I do lie—in a morass sweltering—limbs and flies—The increasing dead—thrown from
carts—

Can a man persist in two places—even if in one he does—molder and decay—

There was—a boy—Beautiful child--I thought--across the fire—When asked his age he replied
—eighteen—But I knew him no more than fifteen—He had—a fine high voice not yet turned—

So he sweetly sang Lorena—Home Sweet Home—while some one other played a fiddle—a
banjo—

When he did attempt—coarsen his voice—shadow his features with—dirt and ash—I said—No
lad you are lovely as you are—I dipped my fingers in the river and washed clean his lip—cheeks

—

Did he ask—lie down in the darkness beside me—the forest floor—musk of rot—stagnant
waters yonder—

My arms about him—tender nape of neck—ears—sun blistered—

I watched you—across the fire—Boastful—lewd—How you did love to kill and fuck—Drink oh
 be joyful until you could no more stand—and the others laugh—ah beauty—mascot adored—I'll
 carry him to his tent I insist—Let him sleep under the stars they say—it will teach the boy
 temperance—How they laugh—Do I later creep to you—a fire light dying—the vast universe
 above—Do I crouch to watch the dew gather like sweet pearls upon your throat—Softly snoring
 —fragile lips trembling—How deeply you sleep—even on fields of annihilation—
 Child—I do not ask—What restless violence compelled you—across towns and prairies—A
 hundred miles trod—your blistered feet—boots no more than rags of leather—You slept in
 ditches—fled wandering dogs—Your father will see you nevermore—your mother—

A stranger—anonymous—yet you have known him many years—Every motion between you
 seems—a memory relived—You swoop beneath his charge—His belly—you rend beautifully
 with your bayonet—a blackened flower there—How he lies—from the mouth bubbling—His
 eyes—as if inflated—A terror serene—Now your bayonet tip to—his Adam's apple—Perhaps he
 will burst—You have already been here—All of this is known—

—Rebel women—thrown to the lawn—breathless—weeping—A widow in black—frenzied
 spitting—The fellow atop her is laughing—Hold still Missus—hold still goddamn you—A slave
 girl screaming runs past—A soldier carries a chicken in each hand by necks broken—How wide
 your yellow smile since the terror began—Save some for me boys you yell—Swiftly almost
 hunched you trot across the lawn—so I follow you into the house—Union boys—opening closet
 doors and flipping mattresses—an attic door is opened and up the ladder they disappear—You

are in the pantry—to your wrist in peach pie—a handful dripping to your mouth—Now you are
throwing open cabinets—Where do these Rebs keep their fucking whiskey—

Had I known myself then—I would have remained in the house burning—outspread on the
widow's canopy'd bed—The ceiling and walls—must swelter—a blackness—glow and throb—
and burst with smoke—noxious fume—The house seethes and moans—while the air—the
essence living—is devoured—The building collapses—and still it consumes—I alone remain—
seeing things in the maelstrom no living man may see—I will burn yet I will not—The pain will
drive me mad but it will mean nothing—Don't you understand I cannot be destroyed—

When I found you child—in the Wilderness burning—Even—face down—I knew—for none
were so small as you—

Cherubim—your throat cleaved open—crimson and bone—

I would remove—your guts and heart—wretched instruments—needed no more—You are pure
now—I whispered—a new thing—

By now child—you are—charcoal and ash—the loam of a new Wilderness—You stand before
me—wretched vapor—Wander my hallways—When you speak—Your lovely voice—lost—
within the vastness—

Blacken the windows I tell Clara—We will carry candles—I dream the sun blotted—eternally—

Clara—yellowed—a haze—Perhaps I was the one who murdered you—I tell her—Perhaps—it
was some man who followed you home—

Is a shade cursed to know what it is—I cannot remember—

A dead god floats somewhere in the ether—He has dreamed this already—

When war again—from the ancient vastness—rears—I tell Clara—You will ride beside me—
gowned in mail—

We will hunt the anarchists—drag them from their beds—screaming—

I will open them for the crows—How beautiful our city—their organs glimmer like—fine jewels
—the intestines for a crown—

They will call you Saint—a Saint of Murder—I tell Clara—Patron Saint of Terror—

My lovely saint—I whisper—My—neither this nor that—You alone did not flinch when the
swine was stuck—removed of organ and pried apart—You alone—did lean forward to—better
see—

There are rooms—I alone may enter—Yet—when you close your eyes—perhaps you see what is
there—

Chamber sacred—A floor crimson—Alter of—hair and bone—The eye socket hollow—teeth—

You woke--screaming--Clara said--Eyes wild even when quieted--I dreamed a light--I said--a
cloud--rising from--where once a city--I have watched many cities burn--the dead--the
wandering near dead--This was different--There was a light--now where once a city--ash
everywhere fell--A girl child to me from the flames--burning--screaming--I thought--I wrestled
her to the ground within a blanket--Beneath my weight--crushing into ash--Now I too--blistering
peeling--

The wind—as you know—carries extinction on its breath—

There is no more beautiful organism than war—a great cloud—colored—sulphur and blood—
some men within—are singing—

I close my eyes and I am lost in it—There are laws--I do not tell Clara--but there are not—War
alone—is above god—

Two men alone in a tent may love each other—It is—a brotherhood—sweet, tender—Together
we wake—His lips—a nectar sublime—He reads aloud his letter home—He tells his wife he
believes he will soon die—

From his window—he looks out over the yard—scurrying bodies—Races—degraded—he says
 —Clara wrote--The Teutonic and Pole—the Slav—are adequate butchers—proficient with
 cleavers—mallets—Covered in blood and flies—Your Englishman—would vomit—but the
 Irishman—No—One sees how dull their eyes—They come here—Why—he asks—smiles—
 Why does a louse ride a dog's back—he answers himself—

Soon we will know real darkness—he insists—Not this—low haze—Finally then—no light will
 penetrate—

His shadow in candle light—his footfalls—pacing—His—breathing—Clara wrote—He refuses
 the laudanum—My mind burns--he cries out—

I take his dictation—by candle light—

My dear Mayor Harrison—he insists I write—We were vapor once—eternal—tracing the face of
 the water—

When he sleeps he dreams of blood—When his mouth opens—

My dear Mayor—the god who did rule this universe floats dead in the vastness—Some cloven
 god other rules this earth—The first man and woman—indistinguishable—raised from his shit—

The anarchist louse—he tells me to write—The anarchist plague—You see already—the
infection they carry—

Mayor—

A male anarchist—a female—It matters not—I would burn their dwellings—cut them down as
they scurry forth—Their offspring—I would smear its brains on the street—

—only a weak man—fails to exterminate a louse—

You cannot know what it is like—to live as his instrument—he tells me—Clara wrote—

I have thrown myself from this window—a hundred times—I have thought—*Now it is finished*

—No—a cloven god--seizes me—mid plummet—Now I stand—without blemish--

His cruelty is immeasurable—

Mayor—Is not every moment of goodness and pleasure a—precursor to affliction—

My dear Mayor—

His he-goat's head—woman's breasts—His cock--obsidian—shining

How voluptuous our god is—my—dear—

He pisses upon alters—and whispers beneath doors—I will tear apart—he cries—I will join
together—

I give them everything they desire—a good scrubbing—a little blood does pink the water—attire them—wool trousers—linen blouses—Dapper—they turn before the mirror—winking at themselves—

I would gown the prettiest—Paint their faces—But these boys will have none of it while they yet live—

They have never seen such rooms—wall tapestries hang—maroon—gold—The carved ceiling—phantasms in combat—A chandelier—lighted—In—tongues mongrel—they marvel—

I give them wine—split pea soup—lamb with mint sauce—boiled potatoes—Ruddy your cheeks—I say—plump your lovely bellies—

I fasted—forty days and nights—he tells me—Clara wrote—My body withered—skin—bone—
organs thrummed through my skin—the blood—

His fist—membraned with blood—Clara wrote—

The servant girl brings a tray—tea—little cakes—Clara wrote—

How busy you gentlemen must be—I say--Clara wrote—The world—unmoored—These
anarchists after all—Explosions—a red glow—A woman—on the street--scattered—blood and
brick--glass—Her infant—The papers don't describe the infant--I say--Clara wrote--Perhaps you
gentlemen could--elaborate--

They sip their tea—smile respectfully—They again ask to see him—I apologize—Only I may
open this door—I insist—And only I may enter—

There is a room—he tells me—Clara wrote—only he may enter—Here his boys will live—until
—Here they will sit—eat—drink—They will become pale—larval—Hanging the walls—
portraits of the dead—their amusements and fascinations—Their progeny—infants swaddled—
bear the faces of ancient men—Male and female child—gowned—without distinction—Pet cats
—hunched—simian—A parakeet—A squirrel—caged—Here a garden—a tiger—a bear—A man
nude—his genitals infinitesimal—a woman at his feet—suppliant—A young boy in this room
reared will soon know only the souls of dead painters—His own voice—echoing and echoing—
Save when to him I speak—This is the history of our wars—I will say—This is how many were
killed—How they were—stripped—mounded in ditches—The child will hear nothing—

Some nights they are here—he says—I'll watch them from my great chair—Swine—sheep—
throats gaping—skulls—pulverized—They have no eyes—only wounds—tongueless mouths—
teeth caked with blood—

Yet they mill—eat potted plants—

One becomes—sentimental in their age—he says—I cluck my tongue—call to them by name—
They hear me not—I clap the louder—Perhaps blood clogs their ears—

They wake me at all hours—baying—chewing—Where did you come from—he coos toward the
floor—

How frantic his eyes—Clara wrote—You bolted the doors—did you not—he asks me—the windows—

Did I finally kill you—he asks—Is that why you are here—

I found my god there—cloven—neither this nor that—You will be no more what you were—they
told me—You will become what you have ever been—They drew a line—from my brow to groin
and now—skin sloughed to ground—Sheathed in man no more—they said—This is the true
thing—Blood—sinew—bone--crimson draped—

He closes his eyes—Clara wrote—He can barely speak—yet—

You see how beautiful he is—a young boy—into manhood ripening—How pungent—Every orifice and pore—a musk—blossoms—

His cock swollen—purple—red—He offers it to me—No lad—I say—He reaches for my own— Just sit—I tell him—I want only to observe—I tell him to defile himself—You foul child— loathsome boy—

There are rooms—where we could marry—You the groom and I your maid—my gown and veil —In those rooms I am something else—In those rooms they call me by a new name—

Bind him to his chair—he tells me—Clara wrote—Perfume him—rose water—Shave him— chest and arms—underarms—groin and ass—Rub him with ointment—make him glisten—Yes see how he shines—

There is a whip in the cabinet—You will lash him until you can no more lift your arm—and then you will open his neck—

His condition is ideal—soon though he will sour—

He is here—yet he is not—Clara wrote—I will build a tower—he tells me—Wonder of the world
—none but I may look upon—Lovely boys—into ivory boiled—femur—sternum—pelvis—
gathered—together strung—arranged—Skulls outward—a stare vacuous—Yet I know them each
—cherubs they were—Where once sweet lips—my fingers trace a—smoothness eternal—I
forget nothing—every scar and pock—Every moan—scream—How they taste—salt and filth—
dead skin—dirt—How they scamper away—hairless, blushing—Their cocks—nubile—a nectar
—viscous—How their eyes flash—when they know—Too quickly then—the flesh—cools—
stiffens—How I—pry open—lips and teeth—He shows me his fingers as if they—bear some
mark—There is no mark—I tell myself—Clara wrote—

I assure you he is—incapable of harming anyone—

He fears the devil---He hears what he calls *whispers*--He believes his soul endangered—

It's true—He does lose himself sometimes—

He's forgetful—His hands beat against his face—his eyes—He stares at me from his—velvet
chair—I could cleave you in half—he tells me—They would never find you—

No matter—I have heard it all before—

He rose from bed—I could only scream—

He was unclothed—at first I could not understand—his abdomen—legs—groin—torn—bleeding
—His bedsheets--blood black—

You see how voluptuous I have become—he said—the true thing at last—

He tells me he was once--shot through the throat—You see here the scar—

You are blessed—I whisper—My hand onto his—clammy—so weak it seems a child's—

Some dead god other—he murmurs—from his tomb in the vastness—conspired against the
vacuum—took dust in hand and blew—Now the atoms writhed in terror—from the universe
burst green shoots—mosses trembling—

Life is malignant—you see how necessary murder becomes—

When he desires summon me in the night—he presses a button—now my quarters flare with light—a ringing—more and more I believe—he does not sleep—

—then came the fever—spasms—His teeth will break—I cry to the maid—Now he lies—
unmoving—entombed until—

Twice each day we must strip and burn his bedsheets—wretched with fluids—He lies in his stench—unknowing—It breaks my heart—You cannot understand his genius—I tell the maid—
This city would not exist—You would not exist—without this man—Yes madam—she whispers
—We work wordlessly—our breathing—heavy—He murmurs—Phantoms—a world of corpses
—Don't listen to him—I tell her—She is discrete—well compensated—Finally he takes the
laudanum—Finally—he lies—silent—his mouth a fish's—

He lies rotting—Bone and vein—Skin—transparent—What hair there was—we remove now in clumps—Toothless—human no more—yet he speaks—I know you did this—He tries to grip my hand—

What did you use—strychnine—arsenic—cyanide—aconite—It will not work—There is nothing I have not attempted—

We will remove the organs—he says—as they perish—I will tell you how—

Did this happen—Did he bring me before a furnace—glowing—He stoops to—a mound of coal
—No—Fingers trace black teeth—Ah sweet youth—he whispers—

Did he ask—Can we not preserve them—arrange them as they were in life—Create some
mechanism to give them voice—Before a great table—they sit anew—perpetual—yammering—

The fruits and meats we do furnish—gather flies—molder—Our boys care not—

I must go—he tells me—Clara wrote—Yes of course I say—I dab his brow—He does not
attempt to rise—He murmurs of a western place—There his god awaits—

A famished land—a circle in the dust around me drawn—Occasionally—a lizard—a tongue
flashes—A scorpion—crimson—ventures to the circle's edge—it will not enter—

Why have you journeyed to this place—it asks—I have come to murder devils—I say—He will
devour you—the scorpion says—

I become—sun withered—a corpse Egyptian—During the day—I bury myself in dust and the
dust blisters—At night I lie shivering—If I could die—I think—this cold would kill me—

A horizon burning—dust swirls—a flash—distant lightning—

He leads a—bleached horse—bone and tendon—I have never seen anything more terrible—He
has no eyes—shrunken pits—yet still he perceives—

He will say Eat of me—His arm scorched—roast lamb—Drink of me—His breast to suckle—
Milk of sin—Milk of life perpetual—

I want to scream but the vastness hears nothing—