

THE ESCAPE ARTIST
-For Chuck Selby

No! I will not go from this place at this time.
I must rest my soul a while, and I must stare,
at one of those... The little things in life.

I am a warrior of the oldest moral class.
A renegade. A tramp. A nomad escape artist.
Yet this night, with predators on my trail,
I am stuck stupid, staring at a wall.

That wall there, on the other side of this room,
there is something odd about it.
And though I know the guards have by now found the tunnel,
this absurd mystery has shattered the instinct to elude.

Four corners as usual, a crack or two.
The moon-lit reflection from window opposite
casts the shadowed drops from a recent rain.
Like fast and slick minnows they flee.
Only serving to remind me of me.

No. Something else about this wall transfixes me,
and foolishly binds me to this room,
fully within the clutches of wonderment.
A trick of light? An anomaly in the glass shine?
I must be on my way, yet like a fool I stay.

Then, like the hateful and impatient gavel slam.
Suddenly terrifying and potent I see,
as only one with the proper eyes is able,
realization gripping me by the nerves of my neck.

It is not the light, corners, cracks, rain.
Nor the pleasure of a strange atmosphere.
It is not this newfound freedom or some phantom pain,
nor the fear that the searchers are near.

But my god! What strikes me dumb and holds my stare,
is what all along has never been there;
On this wall, amid cracks, stains, and reflected stars,
is the flagrant absent shadow of bars.