

ROBERT FROST: A LOVER'S QUARREL WITH THE WORLD

Directed by..... Shirley Clarke, Robert Hughes
Written by Robert Hughes
Produced by..... Robert Hughes
Principal Photography Terence Macartney-Filgate
Edited by Charlotte Zwerin
Music by Charles Gross
Initial Producer Edward Foote
Associate Producer Charlotte Zwerin
Executive Producers David M. Davis, James H. Tonwsend, Jr.

Starring

Robert Frost
John F. Kennedy; Randall Jarrell; G. Armour Craig; Louis Untermeyer; Jason Billings;
Stafford Dragon; Mrs. Theodore Morrison; F.B. Adams, Jr.

Restoration Credits

Filmed on location in Washington, D.C.; New York City, Ripton and Middlebury,
Vermont.

Synopsis

A hybrid of talking heads, an extended speech and pastoral home life, *Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel with the World* studies legendary American poet Robert Frost with the intimate signature of director Shirley Clarke. The film begins with a voiceover from President John F. Kennedy: "The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the lost champion of the individual mind and sensibility, against an intrusive society and officious state." This begins President Kennedy's encomium to Frost, honoring his life and career at a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony on March 26, 1962.

Frost's subsequent speeches at Sarah Lawrence College and Amherst College run throughout the entire film, with Clarke cutting back and forth to excerpts of Frost's laughs and lessons with college students.

Bewildered by "the sideshow" of cameraman and crew members flanking him, Frost comments at the Sarah Lawrence College podium, "This is a documentary film going on ... and [the shots] have all been about me with a hoe digging potatoes or walking in the woods, reciting my own poems." The crowd laughs, as does he, clarifying, "I

don't farm very much — for many years, I have had a little garden — but it is a false picture that presents me as always digging potatoes or saying my own poems.” Crowd erupting once more, Frost concedes that the format Clarke uses at the moment is far preferable: “This time we are going to have it right, we are going to have it taped like this, with my crowd. [The crew was] with me today ... on a carrier, you know, and I was with the commander. The old subject came up ... peace and war, and I had to have another think at it.”

Sure enough, before he finishes speaking Clarke cuts to footage of Frost with a helmet atop his head on board the carrier they filmed earlier. Frost's realist worldview concludes, “Peace is something that you only get by war or the threat of war, however tacit the threat.” His tour between the landing strip and artillery underlines this point.

A Lover's Quarrel with the World progresses in such a fashion, with the elderly Frost, 88, espousing wisdom to his successors (President Kennedy included) while Clarke silently comments with her camera. The bucolic scenes Frost denounces do not necessarily portray a simple, woodsy man, but rather a man at peace. Peace is never easily won, for war certainly has something to do with it. The familiar line that closes his 1944 poem “The Lesson for Today” — “I had a lover's quarrel with the world” — succinctly captures his life, and he is quick to add it is singular because it has been “one sustained quarrel all my life.”

Shirley Clarke (October 2, 1919 – September 23, 1997)

Shirley Brimberg was born in 1919 New York to a very well to do family. Her father Samuel Nathan Brimberg was a Polish-Jewish immigrant who made his fortune in clothing manufacturing. His mother's father had made his own fortune as an industrial inventor.

Shirley was an indifferent student with learning disabilities (she only learned to read in 5th Grade and write in 7th) until she discovered dance in high school. After going through a number of colleges — seven by her count — and never graduating, she studied dance with some of the major figures in the field including Martha Graham, Hanya Holm and Doris Humphrey. 1942 was a momentous year as she staged her first choreography at the 92nd Street YMHA and married lithographer Bert Clarke. Their daughter Wendy was born two years later

However, by the early 1950s, with a young daughter and an aging body, she decided to enter the world of filmmaking. The Brimberg family always had a motion picture camera — there are home movies dating back to the early 1920s — and Shirley had a 16mm camera that she had received as a wedding present.

"Most of the dance films I'd seen were awful and I figured I could do better. Essentially, film's a choreographic medium." — Los Angeles Times interview, 1976

Shirley Clarke started out with what she knew best, dance and movement and she quickly became an esteemed filmmaker at a time when only a few women existed in the field: filmmakers such as Mary Ellen Bute, Maya Deren and Helen Levitt. She studied filmmaking with Hans Richter at the City College of New York, and made her first film, an adaptation of Daniel Nagrin's ballet *Dance in the Sun*, in 1953. Her first project was a dance film as she had seen several but had been impressed by very few. *A Dance in the Sun* included fluid intercuts from interior and exterior locations and did not (as dance films traditionally had) cut between long shots and close-ups of the dancers, which Clarke believed broke up the original patterns of expression in the choreography. She believed that "dance as it existed on the stage had to be destroyed in order to have a good film and not just a rather poor document." (From Gretchen Berg's "Interview with Shirley Clarke," *Film Culture*, no. 44 (Spring 1967): 52.)

Clarke's correspondences with fellow dancer and filmmaker Maya Deren encouraged her to further her progress in dance film. Deren inspired Clarke to see natural human movement as a form of dance as pure as the abstract movements she had previously been filming. Dance, in Deren's interpretation, was an extension of the human consciousness in planes not "anchored in conventional spatiotemporal logic." Clarke's *In Paris Parks* (1954) manifested this concept, although its style differed greatly from that in Deren's films mainly because of its disregard for a rigid structure of motion and because of its upbeat jazz music, which reflected the idea of abstract movement itself. Clarke would go on to further link the idea of jazz, which challenged traditional values in music, with film, as she challenged established values in that medium as well, in *The Connection*.

In Paris Parks is one of her finest early films and it all started by accident. Clarke had travelled to Paris to make a film about the famed mime Étienne DeCroux. She arrived with her camera, her equipment and her daughter Wendy in tow, only to find that he had gone off to Italy. She was in a fury, but with nothing to do, she found herself taking Wendy to the park. On the second day, she realized how extraordinary the experience was, how the children playing was in itself a dance. So she made what she called "a dance of life."

Clarke returned to New York to become a full-time filmmaker. She enrolled in the City College of New York's film program and began to make experimental films. She joined the Independent Film Maker's Association and entered her dance films into competitions. Her third film, *Bullfight*, is the only filmed performance of the legendary choreographer Anna Sokolow. Its success, winning awards at the 1955 Edinburgh Film Festival as well as the 1955 Venice Film Festival, along with awards for her other short films, solidified her career. By 1958, Clarke had become a leading avant-garde figure in experimental film.

Her 1957 *A Moment in Love* was named one of the best ten nontheatrical films of the year by the New York Times. She was also chosen, along with other filmmakers, to create short film loops depicting scenes of American life for the United States Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. She became known as an advocate for the small independent film community in New York, and soon after began to turn towards social issues in her filmmaking.

In 1958, she, Irving Jacoby and Willard van Dyke started a short film on 666 Fifth Avenue (known as the Tishman Building) then a year under construction. Working in 35mm for the first time, she called it "a musical comedy about the building of a skyscraper." They received an Academy Award nomination for *Skyscraper* (1960). And as before, as her fame grew, so did her ambition.

Clarke was now a vital part of the burgeoning post-war American film movement (she was one of the first signers — and the only woman — of the New American Cinema manifesto in 1961) and influenced by the works of Rogosin, James Agee (*The Quiet One*), Helen Leavitt (*In the Street*), Roberto Rossellini (especially *Open City*) and the cinema verité filmmakers. She soon started her first feature film, produced by Lewis Allen with money from hundreds of subscribers; like a Broadway play but at that time, unheard of for film. But *The Connection*, based on the controversial play by Jack Gelber, was far from what they could have imagined. Taking the raw, graphic depiction of drug addicts that Gelber wrote for the stage, she changed the character of the director Jim Dunn to a filmmaker and added a level of humor by poking fun at the world of cinema verité movement. And while constricted to one-set, she combined the French New Wave's mobile camera with a whirling choreography of movement and jazz unseen in independent film before. A hit at Cannes, it was promptly banned by government censor boards for indecent language and a struggle ensued to have it theatrically screened in the United States. After a two-year battle, the producers and director ultimately won in court and as important as it was judicially, it was sadly a case of too little too late as the film lost its timeliness and failed at the box office. But among filmmakers, it was highly influential. The film has been out of distribution since the early 1980s.

"For years I'd felt like an outsider, so I identified with the problems of minority groups. I thought it was more important to be some kind of goddamned junkie who felt alienated rather than to say I am an alienated woman who doesn't feel part of the world and who wants in." — Los Angeles Times interview, 1976.

Clarke's next film, *The Cool World*, was based on a Warren Miller novel and was collaboration with actor Carl Lee. Lee had been one of the stars of *The Connection* (as Cowboy) and during the filming they fell in love. Their relationship was tumultuous but lasted more than twenty years until his death in 1986. *The Cool World* was another melding of harsh reality (this time, set in Harlem), music and choreography. Produced by Fred Wiseman, it has rarely been seen.

"Right now, I'm revolting against the conventions of movies. Who says a film has to cost a million dollars and be safe and innocuous enough to satisfy every 12-year-old in America?... We're creating a movie equivalent of Off Broadway, fresh and experimental and personal. The lovely thing is that I'm alive at just the time when I can do this." — Shirley Clarke, 1962

In 1963, she directed *Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel with the World*. The famed poet was 88-years-old and it was filmed very shortly before his death. But the film revealed his warmth and charm while giving speaking engagements at Amherst and Sarah Lawrence Colleges. Clarke combined this with talks of his work, scenes of his life in rural Vermont and personal reminiscences about his career. He is also seen receiving an award from President Kennedy and touring an aircraft carrier. Clarke shot it for public television and she was reportedly unhappy with the final film, but it won the Academy Award for Best Documentary that year. Her daughter writes, "Shirley did consider (it an honor) that she won an Academy Award for this film and even went to Los Angeles to the Academy Awards. She sat just behind Danny Kaye."

In 1965, she moved into the Chelsea Hotel, the legendary place for artists, authors, musicians and anyone on the outside of New York's business community. Having apartment 822 was advantage — it was one of the penthouse apartments (larger than the tiny rooms in the rest of the building) and her apartment quickly became one of the focal points for the New York cultural scene.

Her fourth feature, *Portrait of Jason*, was a completely different project altogether.

Described by Clarke as a response to the cinema verité works of Leacock and Pennebaker, Portrait of Jason is a fascinating, moving depiction of Jason Holliday, an African American gay prostitute and aspiring nightclub performer. Filmed over twelve hours, from 9 p.m. to 9 a.m., in Clarke's apartment, Holliday's nonstop talking was interrupted only by the reloading of the camera. Clarke described it as "the first time I was able to give up my intense control and allow Jason and the camera to react to each other" As the sole person on screen, Jason "performs" for the camera, improvising and impersonating, relating stories, confessing his sexual encounters, and ultimately revealing himself. It is a self which may or may not relate to the stories he has told, but which comes to "life" before the camera. In Clarke's verité expose, there is no truth; there is a production. "One thing I never expected was the highly charged emotional evening that took place," she said. "How the people behind the camera reacted that night is a very important part of what the film is about." — Kathy Geritz, *Pacific Film Archive*

This time stripping away the contrivances of fiction, Clarke pursued the purest of documentary form. It would be one person, one interview. Clarke and Lee chose as their subject Jason Holliday (formerly Aaron Payne), a gay African-American cabaret performer with a knack for drama. They filmed him over the course of one evening in her Chelsea Hotel apartment. His stories involving racism, homophobia, parental abuse, drugs, sex and prostitution would have been shocking for the day if not for

Holliday's sincere candor and humor. It was an incredible revelation and remains one of the most respected LGBT films. Although preserved by MoMA, it too has not been commercially available since the 1980s. Milestone has acquired the rights and it will be part of the series.

But as successful as *Portrait of Jason* was, it became increasingly difficult to get financing for her films. In 1969 Clarke received a grant from the Museum of Modern Art to develop a system where video could be used to edit film. Although a remarkably prescient idea, foreshadowing the introduction of non-linear editing systems by five years, but it was too ahead of the technological curve and failed. Video, however, intrigued Clarke and she started experimenting with the medium.

"Video allows for an emotional response on the part of the person editing. What's going to change is that you're going to have the same kind of freedom that actors have on stage, yet you can record it. It allows the filmmaker to stay in the creative process longer." — Los Angeles Times interview, 1976.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Clarke experimented with live video performance, returning to her roots as a dancer. She formed the Teepee Video Space Troupe at her Hotel Chelsea's penthouse. This group included video artists Andy Gurian, Bruce Ferguson, Stephanie Palewski, DeeDee Halleck, Vickie Polan, Shridher Bapat, Clarke's daughter Wendy Clarke, and many others. The troupe worked in and around the Hotel Chelsea. The participants included many of her neighbors in the building including Viva, Arthur C. Clarke and Agnes Varda. (Around this time, Clarke appeared as herself in Varda's feature film, *Lion's Love*.) Many of these videos are in need of restoration — film historian and archivist Beth Capper is currently leading a project to preserve the documents and videos of the group.

Clarke became a professor teaching film and video production at [UCLA](#) in 1975 and stayed there for the next ten years. During this period, she also directed two video works based on the theater pieces by Sam Shepard and performed by Joe Chaikin. *Savage/Love* (1981) was a monologue by a murder and *Tongues* (1983) has Chaikin speaking on life and death. Her fifth and final feature, *Ornette: Made in America* was well received and a cinematic comeback of sorts for Clarke. Once again, she was on the cutting edge of film style by merging documentary techniques, video art, music videos and architecture into a meaningful statement. However, in retrospect, producer Kathelin Hoffman Gray noted that Clarke was starting to have signs of Alzheimer's Disease that grew to take over the last decade of her life.



Although she approached Hollywood once or twice in her career and Hollywood approached her several times, it was always broke down to being a work-for-hire — something she would wisely refuse each time. But in an interview with Marjorie Rosen, Clarke stated, *“To tell the truth, if I had the talent or the particular abilities to make Hollywood movies, I guess I’d be making them — actually, as a moviegoer I personally would take the likes of Duck Soup over The Connection any day.”* She shared a birthday with Groucho Marx and claimed it was also the birthday of Felix the Cat. In fact she had a deep love for anything related to Felix the Cat and each of her films has a reference to the cartoon feline, much like a Hitchcock appearance.

When she became incapacitated, her longtime friends David and Piper Cort took her in for care, Clarke died of a stroke in Boston, Massachusetts in 1997.

For a filmmaker that specialized in subject matter that was intended to shock audiences, perhaps the most shocking aspect of Shirley Clarke’s career is her lack of recognition in today’s film history. Although acknowledged by filmmakers as a major influence, there is not one single book devoted to Shirley Clarke’s work nor has there been a significant release of her films. Milestone’s Shirley Clarke project is intended to present as many of her films in beautifully restored versions as possible.

Robert Frost
(March 26, 1874 — January 29, 1963)



Robert Frost is the rare artist to achieve equal reverence from the public and the critics — and during his lifetime, no less. In the league of Walt Whitman and few others, and certainly no one since, Frost captivated America with his words for over half a century.

Born on March 26, 1874, Frost was raised in San Francisco to his Anglo-American parents, William Prescott Frost, Jr. and Isabelle Moodie. His father, a teacher and editor of the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin*, died of tuberculosis when Robert was 11 years old and the family then moved to Lawrence, Massachusetts, an urban town unlike the pastoral setting so intrinsic to his work.

He studied at Dartmouth College for a few months, pledging as a brother in the Theta Delta Chi fraternity during the time. After returning back to Lawrence and working a handful of low-rate jobs, he sold his first poem, “My Butterfly. An Elegy,” to *The New York Independent* for \$15 in 1894. Shortly after, he proposed to Elinor Miriam White, who declined in order to finish her studies at St. Lawrence University. However, they married on December 19, 1895, after she graduated and he took a leave of absence at the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia. They had their first child, Elliot, the next year, along with five other children — Lesley (1899), Carol (1902), Irma (1903), Marjorie (1905) and Elinor (1907) — over the next decade. Unfortunately, Elliot died of cholera in 1900 and Elinor died of birth complications. The Frost family was also struggling to get by, living on their new farm in Derry, New Hampshire with little income or security.

During this period of grief and struggle, Frost found his poetic voice and started officially publishing his work. He managed to publish two of his earliest poems — “The Tuft of Flowers” and “The Trial by Existence” — in 1906 but it took another six years to release his first collection of poetry, *A Boy’s Will*. The influence of Frost’s

residence in New Hampshire manifested in his writing for the rest of his life. In order to fully launch his career, however, he moved his family to Beaconsfield, Britain, where publishers were less commercial and more willing to take a chance with new talent. *A Boy's Will* was published shortly after, followed by poetry compilation *North of Boston* in 1914, the next year.

Frost developed influential friendships at the time with fellow writers Edward Thomas, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound. The celebrated and controversial Pound was the first American to publicly praise Frost's work in a published review. The two clashed throughout their life, but Frost and fellow friend Ernest Hemingway petitioned for Pound's release from a federal mental hospital on charges of treason, which was successful after indictments were dropped. Frost attributed "The Road Not Taken," one of his most acclaimed works, to discussions and walks with Thomas, as well.

England commenced Frost's professional life and defined much of his world outlook. The onset of World War I in 1914 shook up Europe, causing Frost's family to move early the next year to Franconia, New Hampshire. Critics and publishers welcomed his arrival back in the States; a lifelong influential career had begun.

Throughout the time periods of 1916-20, 1923-24 and 1927-38, Frost taught English at Massachusetts' Amherst College. He pursued what he called "the sound of sense," encouraging students to translate the sound and flow of the English language into their writing. During almost every summer and fall from 1921 to 1963, Frost lived Ripton, Vermont, teaching at Middlebury College's Bread Loaf School of English. Also in 1921, the University of Michigan offered Frost a fellowship teaching post, which he accepted; he taught and resided in Ann Arbor until 1927. Teaching was a fundamental pillar of Frost's life, which the finest schools across the Western world recognized and honored: He received over 40 honorary degrees, including his unfinished alma mater, Harvard, as well as Cambridge, Oxford, Princeton and Dartmouth, the latter of which he received the singular honor of two degrees.

Robert Frost holds a record four Pulitzer Prizes in Poetry (only Carol Guzy, photographer, and Eugene O'Neill, playwright, also hold four Pulitzers, the highest number earned). The collections of poetry the Pulitzer committee honored are *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* (1924), *Collected Poems* (1931), *A Further Range* (1937) and *A Witness Tree* (1943). But perhaps Frost's greatest honor occurred on January 20, 1961, when he read his famous poem "The Gift Outright" at President John F. Kennedy's inauguration, per his personal request. Frost had actually written a new poem, "Dedication," for the ceremony and brought a handwritten copy to recite. The sun glare proved too intense for his ailing vision, so he delivered the memorized poem instead. Frost passed away due to complications from prostate surgery two years later, on January 29, 1963. The epitaph on his gravestone in Bennington, Vermont reads: "I had a lover's quarrel with the world."

“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

“Birches” by Robert Frost

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,

And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
(Now am I free to be poetical?)
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.
And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.
May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

“The Lesson for Today” by Robert Frost

If this uncertain age in which we dwell
Were really as dark as I hear sages tell,
And I convinced that they were really sages,
I should not curse myself with it to hell,
But leaving not the chair I long have sat in,
I should betake me back ten thousand pages
To the world's undebatably dark ages,
And getting up my medieval Latin.
Seek converse common cause and brotherhood
(By all that's liberal—I should, I should)
With the poets who could calmly take the fate
Of being born at once too early and late,
And for those reasons kept from being great,
Yet singing but Dione in the wood
And *ver aspergit terram floribus*
They slowly led old Latin verse to rhyme
And to forget the ancient lengths of time,
And so began the modern world for us.

I'd say, O Master of the Palace School,
You were not Charles' nor anybody's fool:
Tell me as pedagogue to pedagogue,
You did not know that since King Charles did rule
You had no chance but to be minor, did you?
Your light was spent perhaps as in a fog
That at once kept you burning low and hid you.
The age may very well have been to blame
For your not having won to Virgil's fame.
But no one ever heard you make the claim.
You would not think you knew enough to judge
The age when full upon you. That's my point.
We have today and I could call their name
Who know exactly what is out of joint
To make their verse and their excuses lame.
They've tried to grasp with too much social fact
Too large a situation. You and I
Would be afraid if we should comprehend
And get outside of too much bad statistics
Our muscles never could again contract:
We never could recover human shape,
But must live lives out mentally agape,

Or die of philosophical distention.
That's how we feel—and we're no special mystics.

We can't appraise the time in which we act
But for the folly of it, let's pretend
We know enough to know it for adverse.
One more millennium's about to end.
Let's celebrate the event, my distant friend,
In publicly disputing which is worse,
The present age or your age. You and I
As schoolmen of repute should qualify
To wage a fine scholastical contention
As to whose age deserves the lower mark,
Or should I say the higher one, for dark.
I can just hear the way you make it go:
There's always something to be sorry for,
A sordid peace or an outrageous war.
Yes, yes, of course. We have the same convention.
The groundwork of all faith is human woe.
It was well worth preliminary mention.
There's nothing but injustice to be had,
No choice is left a poet, you might add,
But how to take the curse, tragic or comic.
It was well worth preliminary mention.
But let's go on to where our cases part,
If part they do. Let me propose a start.
(We're rivals in the badness of our case,
Remember, and must keep a solemn face.)
Space ails us moderns: we are sick with space.
Its contemplations makes us out as small
As a brief epidemic of microbes
That in a good glass may be seen to crawl
The patina of this the least of globes.
But have we there the advantage after all?
You were belittled into vilest worms
God hardly tolerated with his feet;
Which comes to the same thing in different terms.
We both are the belittled human race,
One as compared with God and one with space.
I had thought ours the more profound disgrace;
But doubtless this was only my conceit.
The cloister and the observatory saint
Take comfort in about the same complaint.
So science and religion really meet.

I can just about hear you call your Palace class:

Come learn the Latin Eheu for alas.
You may not want to use it and you may.
O paladins, the lesson for today
Is how to be unhappy yet polite.
And at the summons Roland, Olivier,
And every sheepish paladin and peer,
Being already more than proved in fight,
Sits down in school to try if he can write
Like Horace in the true Horatian vein,
Yet like a Christian disciplined to bend
His mind to thinking always of the end.
Memento mori and obey the Lord.
Art and religion love the somber chord.
Earth's a hard place in which to save the soul,
And could it be brought under state control,
So automatically we all were saved,
Its separateness from Heaven could be waived;
It might as well at once be kingdom-come.
(Perhaps it will be next millennium.)

But these are universals, not confined
To any one time, place, or human kind.
We're either nothing or a God's regret.
As ever when philosophers are met,
No matter where they stoutly mean to get,
Nor what particulars they reason from,
They are philosophers, and from old habit
They end up in the universal Whole
As unoriginal as any rabbit.

One age is like another for the soul.
I'm telling you. You haven't said a thing,
Unless I put it in your mouth to say.
I'm having the whole argument my way—
But in your favor—please to tell your King—
In having granted you all ages shine
With equal darkness, yours as dark as mine,
I'm liberal. You, you aristocrat,
Won't know exactly what I mean by that.
I mean so altruistically moral
I never take my own side in a quarrel.
I'd lay my hand on his hand on his staff
Lean back and have my confidential laugh,
And tell him I had read his Epitaph.

It sent me to the graves the other day.

The only other there was far away
Across the landscape with a watering pot
At his devotions in a special plot.
And he was there resuscitating flowers
(Make no mistake about its being bones);
But I was only there to read the stones
To see what on the whole they had to say
About how long a man may think to live,
Which is becoming my concern of late.
And very wide the choice they seemed to give;
Thee ages ranging all the way from hours
To months and years and many many years.
One man had lived one hundred years and eight.
But though we all may be inclined to wait
And follow some development of state,
Or see what comes of science and invention,
There is a limit to our time extension.
We all are doomed to broken-off careers,
And so's the nation, so's the total race.
The earth itself is liable to the fate
Of meaninglessly being broken off.
(And hence so many literary tears
At which my inclination is to scoff.)
I may have wept that any should have died
Or missed their chance, or not have been their best,
Or been their riches, fame, or love denied;
On me as much as any is the jest.
I take my incompleteness with the rest.
God bless himself can no one else be blessed.

I hold your doctrine of Memento Mori.
And were an epitaph to be my story
I'd have a short one ready for my own.
I would have written of me on my stone:
I had a lover's quarrel with the world.

Milestone Would Like to Thank the Following:

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