

Paul Drake never told Mason he was from Cincinnati.
If it came up, he'd mumble, vaguely, about the 'east.'
Now, as he stood under a streetlight glowing blue
In the night, watching the undersides of the leaves
As they tossed, silver, in the darkness, he felt
The man he was after on this case was himself. . .

The jolt was so strong he dropped ashes on himself.
He brushed frantically at the flame. "Cincinnati—!"
He swore violently, regarding the hole in his felt
Elbow patch. The signpost glowed like a tooth: 'E.
McMillan'—he needed 'W.' As he flipped the leaves
Of his notebook, dreaming, they blended like the blue

Notes of a saxophone, phrasing a passage that blew
Down the lonely streets of his past. He punched himself
In the face: his brain cells were falling like leaves
Under the spell of that old siren, Cincinnati. . .
He thought of Mason's banter, before he'd come east:
"Don't bring me a painting of a bull on black felt!"—

Until, seeing Paul's face, he had asked how he felt.
"With my hands!" But the grin was gone, into the blue,
Rising in the west as the sun rises in the east,
Heading straight for a mid-air collision with himself
In the musical smog of the mind over Cincinnati. . .
As he flew, the years fell away from him like leaves.

Paul crushed his cigarette. Soon, the bus would leave,
Carrying him ever closer to that mirror image he felt
Would at last solve the mystery, the song, of Cincinnati.
Would he grab that wrist, and shout, "Okay, you blew
It, the gorilla suit fooled no one!"—goading himself
To fury at the union, forty years ago, here in the 'east,'

When someone had used the costume of a 'h-hairy b-b-east'
And the words 'M-my little P-Penguin' to seduce, then leave
A mongoloid nun, her womb filling with Paul himself. . .
Finally, the hotel, the toothless night clerk—Paul felt
Clammy, nauseous, as the old man fluttered his pale blue
Eyes: "D-Drake? M-my name, too. Welcome to C-Cincinnati."

† † †

*In his ape mask, Paul felt the blue barrel kick, cleave
The clerk's face from east to west. . . He shook himself—
The clerk was snoring. . . It was evening in Cincinnati.*

Perry and the fly were debating the question of animality.

"We choose a totem as the image of the cry we make inside
One night, our mouths no longer able to surround, contain,
The fiery death of the brain in the face of too much. . . ."

"Yeah? So how come yo' talk lak me when yo' open yo' mouf?"

"Foucault," Perry fudged, "would say, *As death is the limit*

Of human life in the realm of time, madness is its limit—

Perry paused theatrically—*in the realm of animality. . . .*"

"Say *whut?*" But Perry stuffed a thermometer in his mouth

Hurriedly, as a nurse entered. "It's too nice to be inside,
Isn't it?" she said cheerfully. Perry felt she had too much
Lipstick on. Glaring, he indicated that his mouth contained

A thermometer. "Not *that* thermometer! Those jars contain

Rectal—!" She guffawed as Perry spat. *That's the limit!*

He blew up. He went for her. *A man can only take so much!*

The fly shrieked, "Sho'ly we enterin' de realm ob' *animality!*"

As it hopped up and down on Perry's shoulder. "Git inside

Her *pants*, man! Go fo' it! Stuff yo' tube into dat *mouf!*"

But Perry had other ideas about her mascara, her red mouth.

Launching his whale-like body toward her, his mind contained

Alien, yet familiar pictures, welling up from deep inside—

They roared on savagely, an unbroken stream, without limit,

Arcing through the dim past: a fudgesickle, Ann O'Malley's T-

Shirt, wettened by a hose, Aunt Ginny's nylon hose, too much

Of her legs, his mother's legs, at an odd angle . . . "Too much,"
Winked the doctor, stuffing a pill into Perry's slack mouth.
He wagged his head. "The awesome force of the anima . . . Lithi-
Um is what he needs, the only thing that'll help him contain
Life and sanity in what, let's face it, is a seemingly limit-
Less expanse of flesh." Turning, he touched the nurse inside

Her blouse, lips squirming all over her face. "Oh, yes, inside
Me . . ." she moaned. The fly blinked all its eyes. "Too much,
Man, dey's too much! Jes' looka dat. If dey ain't de limit!"
Catatonic, his face stony as an oracle's cave, Perry's mouth
Opened: "*The configuration of animal spirits the body contains
Activates to save itself . . . thus succumbing to animality . . .*"

† † †

"Too much whut's inside yo' *brain* sh'd be inside her *mouf*!"
Under a cold, clear moon, the fly watched his friend contain,
In his hand's rhythmic motion, the limits of his animality . . .