

The Old Woods

(for Gerard Swartz and Bill Koehl)

I have read deep thoughts and exalted hearts'-pourings written,
I have seen rare knobs of our nature breaking through the skin,
I have understood the numb wonders of numbers, chemical fluids
and constructed objects,

I have eaten frogs'-legs and prune whip,
Have sat entranced at banquet eloquence,
And I have been shipped on the tense relentless rails of involvement;

Oh I have lived! but more

Than all these I want

To walk in the old woods,

To watch them grow from was to will be and will be to was,

Dirty-white cluttered with black in winter,

Rank, green and stinging in spring

And brown and rattly in summer

And in fall.

I am a little sick, I am time-sick, youth-sick

For the old woods.

They maroon me, imprison me, surface ever again like recurring isles
in the sea of my mind,

Admit no rival.

Muck, stillness, wounds and rashes from weeds, brown stench of
swollen creek, infinite mindless insects' dronings, even the
garbage of Chicago picnickers,

Cannot sour them in my heart nor submerge them in my thoughts.

Against all and above all rise the images:

Tree trunks, rain, red-shouldered hawks, tangled twigs and bushes,
thick grass,

Thin green flower stems, fair weather, prothonotary warblers, yellow
fields, violets and wild mice ...

I have painted them all in my eyes with fuller craft, far fuller and
finer craft,

Than all the painters.

The old woods, insular, all-of-a-cloth, a coat of many colors, are
an accomplished world, are the old world;

They will last.

When they are flattened, ruined, rubbed out,

Covered with cement,

The smack and spirit of the old woods yet

Will shimmer in the bland air and be seen.

It will be better to dream a little in the old woods

Than to wander and sing in the high gold of Heaven; yes,

The old woods, the quiet wild-colored wet and dry smell and hum and
wearing of the woods like an old worn coat

Are in my poor life's blood; well I know

The old woods.

Jack Collom,
Red Car Goes By
(Tumba Press:
2001)