

HEADMASTER LEAVING

The snowflakes on the oaks have stayed the same
Through all the changing winters of the years
As every boy's bright face has since I came
To make pressed lips articulate with tears.

The scrums, the prep-times, first loves, chapel prayers,
The Founders' Days, the war dead etched on brass,
Tired prefects calling "Lights out!" from the stairs —
These were the holy texts in memory's mass.

And though I bore the headship and its stress —
Hirings, firings, urging Old Boys to give
And give again, yet doing more with less,
My life a death through which a school might live —

This classroom was my own, oak-paneled, small,
Unfitted with those terminals and screens
New colleagues use so loudly down the hall,
Their blackboards not on walls but in machines.

And here each year a dwindling remnant read
That first and greatest tale of rage and lust,
Dreaming of Helen's breasts and Hector dead,
Troy's battlements collapsed in burning dust.

Yet now at last I leave a room for good
Where ghosts still whisper Greek attentively
While twilight blooms through panes in Gothic wood
And snow in oaks falls silent over me.