The Upstate New York Poetry Circuit: A 15-Day Diary

Richard Hugo
Saturday, October 5. 5:30 p.m. Boulder. Bill Matthews came by to watch the baseball playoffs. He gave me the rotten news about Anne Sexton but was uncertain of his information. I called Richard Howard and it’s true. He had just gotten a call from Howard Moss. Never knew her but exchanged a couple of letters with her over 10 years ago. She couldn’t get my address right and on one letter that had been returned to her she wrote at the top, “Damn! What IS your address.” Richard was sad and subdued on the phone. Bill and I talked about it for a while but what’s to say? Tomorrow I fly east to Syracuse where Roger Dickinson-Brown will meet me and drive me to Oswego. First reading there Monday afternoon. Though I didn’t know Sexton or even her work very well, I feel personally affected. Maybe because, like most of us, she wrote out of need — that’s obvious in her poems — and maybe that is a bond. Real as any other? Matthews is strong, witty, decent — just a good man to have around anytime and I’m especially glad he was here today. Later, the day gone dark and raw, I went out for some cigarettes. The car radio started to play a tune from my youth, “Tuxedo Junction.” Not Glen Miller but the melody was there and I stayed in the car in the parking lot until the song was finished. Ripley got a nap this afternoon and her leg felt better afterward. Damned sciatica. She has the bad habit of always working, but I’m getting her to accept leisure as a way of life. When in doubt, sit and stare moodily out of the windows.

Sunday, October 6. 11:30 a.m. Stapleton Airport. Denver. Couldn’t find a thing about Sexton in the Denver Post this morning but there was an article in the Boulder Daily Camera. Said she was a suicide or died from natural causes. Jesus. Natural causes. Are we to think she drove her car into the garage, left the motor running, got out and closed the door, got back into the car to shut the motor off and suffered instant cancer? Or that she came out and started the motor to go someplace before opening the garage doors and had a heart attack? According to the article she was found in the car, the motor running and the garage doors closed. But some people still consider suicide disrespectful — as if respectability meant a shit anymore. How very much flying I’ve done the last few years. I think
for many years I kept those old war flying fears alive with booze long after they had diminished. I still drug myself a bit. Good old triavil and good old Doctor Armstrong of Missoula, Montana who with his prescription has removed most of the remaining fear. Just took one but it will take awhile. What a subnormal looking woman across the way but I must not trust appearances. Probably nuclear physicist or Mary McCarthy. Someone else is writing in a notebook. Tall, dignified man, gray hair. I'll bet he uses the passive voice and never splits an infinitive. Got seat 21A, left side, north side. No sun in my eyes. I'm very clever these days. Chicago in two hours, three minutes. With jets we could have flown to Vienna and back in three hours and been high above the flak. I always assumed someday I'd meet Sexton. The triavil hasn't started to work.

4:50 p.m. Chicago. If you've been flying in circles for over an hour, worried about missing your connection, are hot and sweating, pissed off because you just ran seven or eight miles through the airport and now are waiting for your next flight because it's late too, where else could you be but O'Hare Field. This is not my favorite place. It's not even close. But I did see one of my favorite actors here once. Don Gordon. Saw him two nights ago on TV when he played Steve McQueen's assistant in Bullitt. Obviously better than McQueen who is not bad. I wanted to say to him that day in Chicago, "I'm a fan, Mr. Gordon. And I really like your acting." But I didn't have the nerve. I do like him. Throttle wide open actor, a sort of new school Anton Walbrook.

9:30 p.m. Oswego. Roger Dickinson-Brown picked me up in Syracuse as planned. Oswego. I gather from D-B and from what observation was possible in the dark, is absolutely unpretentious. A working man's town, Italian. Not the least bit mean or rowdy. Something touching about it. Almost forlorn. Marvelous old frame taverns. I wish I still drank. This is a town you could lose yourself to yourself in, the way you sometimes have to in poems. You could live your life out here, totally ignored. But that's a fantasy I enjoy only while it remains a fantasy. Jesus I'm so weak in two days I'd be sending letters to APR saying, I'm still here, gang. D-B seems a nice sort. He feels Stafford's more recent poems abandon the love of detail for its own sake, that Someday, Maybe is his best book but is not well received because it is too different from his other work. That's a good reason. When you love some of Bill's earlier work the way I do, you want him to go right on writing like that forever. But Bill, unlike me, is capable of growth. Let's hear it for us stagnant poets. D-B said the
A's won today and the Dodgers. Why in hell do I take these trips during the playoffs and the series, when I'm such a buff. I did that last year. Saw a playoff game between Cincinnati and the Mets in Bobbie Gafford's apartment in Birmingham, Alabama. Must call Ripley, let her know I arrived ok. American Airlines seems better than most. They don't seem to be herding people around like cattle and the employees seem to be free of that awful professional delivery when they talk to you. One nice thing about living close to Denver, it's easy to go on readings without all those damn stops and starts and you make out of Missoula. First reading tomorrow at 4:15. I like afternoon readings. I think that's a holdover from my drinking days when an afternoon reading left more booze time. But why make a reading an event? The best thing America ever did for her poets was ignore them. That forced us to take ourselves seriously because no one else would. That can be good for the poems, bad for the personality. No clothes hangers. No ashtrays. No phone. The bastards. Now I can't call Ripley. They'll never break me though. Man can live without coat hangers or even without calling his wife but recent findings by archaeologists show that the ashtray goes back at least 500,000 years. So it must be a necessity. D-B says he is going to submit a book. I feel for him. How hard it is to get that first book published.

October 7. 7:00 a.m. I slept nine hours. I never sleep nine hours. Must be a personal record. Must be the change in altitude. It can't be high here. Boulder is 5,400, maybe higher at our house. Waiting for D-B for breakfast. No ashtrays. The bastards. Still, I like being put up in guest rooms in student dorms. Reading at 4:15. I hope I read ok. I mean recite because that's mostly what I do since Northwest Airlines lost my bag on that five-day stint in Portland last spring. Oh, I moaned and gnashed my teeth but recitation is more impressive. I could have done it years ago but NW forced me to when they lost my ms. How in hell can you lose a bag between Missoula and Portland? It's hardly Singapore to Nome for Christ sakes. Anyway, I realize now that I felt I needed something between me and the audience and that something was the page, the poem. I hadn't needed that for years but only found out recently. No coffee around either.

10:00 a.m. A beautiful storm blew in last night. And it's still blowing. Wow. I couldn't see Lake Ontario last night in the dark but it's right here. Had breakfast with D-B and we looked out the window at the raging lake only a few feet from the cafeteria. We look north at Canada but Canada is out of sight. Nothing but rage and void and so much like the Washington coast that I am home. Oh, that wind, that
gray wild expanse. Baby. I even imagine I see salal, but that can't be. Very humane fellow, D-B. I hope his book is good and is taken. But then I wish good luck for any poet I happen to like. The young poets are getting good these days. Looking at the lashing waters this morning I realized I don't like poets who don't like storms and the ocean, even if it is Lake Ontario. I must call Ripley and let her know I arrived ok. It's a good feeling to have someone after ten years living alone, except for those few happy months with Kathy. What in hell can a poet do with happiness? Whatever it is, I'm going to find out. I am for the ocean and lots of feeling. I am for Oswego, New York. It's only eight in Colorado. I'll wait till Ripley gets Melissa off for school before I call. D-B shared my sadness about Sexton. We talked about Stafford, Richard Howard, Jean Valentine, Diane Wakoski. I know I'm at low altitude because the flies are slow. They are quick as mongooses in the mountains. The higher the altitude, the quicker the flies. Maybe they have superchargers. I'm on the side of ecologists but for the elimination of all flies and mosquitoes. Is that a possible position? Outside Ontario bashes the shore and the trees are frantic in the wind pouring out of the Northwest. Some trees are Stafford trees acting out whatever has happened to them. Seagulls. Oh, I am home. If I were a student here I'd just stare moodily out of the windows at the water until they flunked me out, then drink my life away in those charming taverns in town.

1:45 p.m. And still the winds hammer and the lake stays nuts. But damn it, it's not a lake. Lakes are sane. This is the ocean. What do the natives or those stupid cartographers know? Lunch with Lewis Turco. He looks like a grocer. Your friendly neighborhood grocer, the one you loved to go to for penny candy when you were a kid, the one who, when he died, left a major hole in the neighborhood air that never filled up. "He looks too like a grocer for respect" Auden wrote characterizing the empty snobbishness of the respectable. Turco looks enough like a grocer to win your everlasting affection. What an energetic and delightful man. God, he's published 11 books—only Robin Skelton tops that among my acquaintances—or does Wagoner have that many now? I think he does. Turco and three girls, Cheryl, Brenda and Georgia, and D-B all at lunch. Cheryl tells us that a hole in the clouds that lets the sun through just before a squall hits is called 'a sucker hole.' That is too good to pass up. Turco and D-B test their wits for awhile on that one to my delight. After lunch I walk down to the beach. The storm coughed up a lot of smelt and the water didn't come back for them. They are everywhere, staring at the nothing the dead find fascinating. I pick up a pebble for Ripley. D-B
has a brother in crime and Turco’s father was an Italian Baptist minister. Read in 2½ hours. Nice posters about. D-B’s wife did the drawing. She’s ok. D-B mentioned she’s an artist. I already feel that way I always feel on tour: I want to stay here. I’ll feel that way wherever I go. But where else on this trip will I find fierce wind, ocean, gulls, nervous trees. I’ll sit and stare at the mean water until D-B comes. Must get Turco’s book on forms.

2:45 p.m. It just struck me that the reason so many poets get oiled before they read is that without booze they don’t feel worthy of their audience. Can that be right? Pretty close. God help me, I must be getting mature. I feel worthy of my audience without booze. But if I admit that, will it reduce my chances of reading well? Over-confidence is to be avoided at all costs. By the 9th reading, at Syracuse, I’ll probably be as spontaneous as a morality play. Or is it that we are so hopelessly conceited that we compensate, afraid someone might see what we really are? Or is it really simple: we are weak slobs. Flash Gordon and Gary Cooper never wrote poems. Does Mao get good reviews in China?

11:30 p.m. I read badly for half the reading at least. My timing was off and to compensate I pushed and my voice got too high. Finally settled back and stopped pressing, something I’ve disciplined myself to do when things aren’t going well. Years ago, I just pushed harder and my voice rose to a wail. Anyway, I was disappointed. Dinner with D-B, Turco, oodles of others. Cheryl, Brenda, Georgia. Nice party at Tom and Mary Lowe’s. Wine for all except me. I had too much coffee. Hate to leave tomorrow, this storm, this bad assed sea. But what connections wait at Wells. Turco turns out to be an outrageous punster. Wife Jean very lovely and very warm to talk to. D-B’s wife is interesting and with some depth, observant but with a warm eye. Cheryl drove me home. She was high. I think she’s high without help from wine. She’s a pretty girl and nutty in the right way. I am a sucker for school girl charm and even had ideas but to hell with that. At 50 I can sure as hell handle loneliness. The wind knows I’ve had enough practice. D-B will drive me to Wells. Maybe Turco will go along. That’s good company, D-B and Turco. Host at Aurora: Bruce Bennett. Isn’t that the name of the actor, the loner who tried to cut himself in in Treasure of Sierra Madre? Once was Tarzan under the name, Herman Brix? Or is that his real name? He was in Mystery Street too, an underrated flick of 20 years back. I have the feeling that Oswego serves students in the right way. D-B and Turco are good influences. People seem to know where they live here. Neither D-B
nor Turco would stand back and say, I know something, try to find out what. Lord, how many profs do that. Here the relation between students and faculty seems neither remote and formal nor sloppy. Turco told me about a man who used to inscribe his books with phrases that sounded like great flashes of wisdom: “To Lewis Turco, a man who knows the difference between vision and revision.” And no one caught on for years. For inscriptions nothing beats that all time all time from your high school annual: Good luck to a swell kid. Maybe high school students are more sophisticated now.

October 8. 7:30 a.m. Six hours sleep. That’s more like me. I’m already looking past Wells at Cornell. Ten years ago I read at Cornell and drew maybe ten people and for the only time since I started reading I let the smallness of the audience bother me. Why did it bother me there? I can’t decide if I hate Cornell because I got a small crowd there or because I really hate myself for being so damned temperamental. Sad that Archie isn’t there this year, but that dear Albert Goldbarth is and it will be good to see him. My new mother-in-law, the novelist Mildred Walker (Schemm) is coming down from Vermont for the reading at Wells. She taught there several years. Bill Matthews, now with me at Colorado, was her replacement at Wells. Ripley went there for a year before returning to Swarthmore. Nesselhoff who teaches there is godfather to Matthew, my stepson, and Ripley is godmother to Nesselhoff’s daughter Sarah. And my siamese twin sister separated from me at birth by the infamous Dr. Dullscalpel, is buried on campus following the return of her body from Germany where she was executed in 1944, the greatest spy in the history of warfare. This is my first chance to visit her grave. D-B should be here soon for breakfast. The lake is just a lake this morning, well adjusted as ivy.

Aurora, 2:30 p.m. Wells College. D-B told me the sad news this morning that last night after Cheryl dropped me off she found out her aunt had died, the fourth death in her family in a short time. Lunch with D-B, Mildred and Bruce Bennett, a charming warm man, very mild, a truly gentle personality. He took along his baby to the Aurora Inn and now I’m in the Prophet’s Chambers after being dropped off by Mildred. Poets stay here in this split level — no, it’s actually a two floor apartment. Some impressive ghosts here. Merwin was here, but he’s no ghost. Hopefully won’t be for a long time, and after that, will be forever. Girls, 500 girls. In my fantasy this is paradise. Lovely lake that could be only a lake, lovely old homes, lawns, vivid fall trees and
girls. But in real life, like a lot of men, I find women in numbers oppressive. Had lunch with three women once and felt like a jockstrap too old for one more washing. It’s nothing they do or try to do. It just happens. Maybe it’s something I do to myself in their presence. I remember years ago at Ft. Wright, 300 girls, I just had to go into town with a couple of guys the third day and get drunk in some rundown taverns. When I told Madeline DeFrees about my feelings, how I found women in numbers oppressive, she said, “They have the same effect on me, Dick.” She probably doesn’t feel that way now. Dear Madeline. Who ever thought we’d end up colleagues at Montana, that she would get her whatever they call it in religion (in baseball, it’s unconditional release) from the order the same day as my birthday and drive back in snowstorms so we could celebrate together. What a lot she has been through and what a brave woman she is. How can a poet that good be overlooked so long? More thanks to Richard Howard, who saves us all sooner or later. Nap soon. Maybe I’m all over finding women oppressive in clusters. I hope I read better tonight. Bennett was connected with Ploughshares and Field, two of my favorite magazines. I wonder how Madeline is getting along at Victoria. Now if only a dozen of the loveliest coeds will come to the Prophet’s Chambers and play out my favorite fantasies and afterward I can go out on the dirt roads in tatters and live the rest of my life in shame and degradation. It shouldn’t be hard to find snobs back here who could help me on my way to oblivion. I can hear the violins on the sound track now.

**Wednesday, October 9. 12:10 a.m.** Much better. Within ten minutes after I started I was grooving. Voice good. Timing good. No throw aways and what a good audience. Didn’t feel oppressed, not a bit, not even afterward surrounded by coeds and answering questions. Despite the quiet subdued nature of the girls here — they are terribly polite and civilized — from what we call “good homes” I suppose — every once in awhile walking about the campus I hear a terrible shriek. I told Bruce and Connie Bennett about a movie I saw advertised a few years ago in Seattle: *Tower of Screaming Virgins*. Now there’s a title. My kind of title. To hell with all this subtlety. Out with it, I say. Dinner tonight before the reading at Tom and Fran Helmstadters. A pleasant enough time. After the reading Mildred and I called Ripley and how great it was to hear her voice. I do miss her and the kids, more and more. Mildred in her isolation and loneliness worries and disapproves. She disapproves of my giving Ripley money for clothes before we were married. She disapproves my smoking so much. She wants me to have a hip replacement operation to cure the temporary lameness I suffer in my left leg often after sitting down for awhile. It struck me suddenly as very funny,
having her here. I can think of some who would find having their mothers-in-law show up when they are reading at a girls' school the final blow of fate. No names please. I'm glad Mildred is here. Not to keep me in line. I'm hardly a philanderer. It's just good to get to know her a little better. Her worry about our lives is obviously the result of loneliness. Though I'm irritated a bit I'm also touched. She remarked that now girls could have men in their rooms all night. Good, I said. I couldn't tell how she felt, regretful, disapproving, resentful? Anyone who thinks morality changes is foolish. Only conversation changes. The world was always horny. Sex is like writing a poem. If you want it bad enough —. And most do. Met a young writer named Marianne Loyd. BB showed me some of her things in the student mag. She's good. I'd like to have her in class some day. Maybe she'll come west for grad work. The more good writers I get, the more undeserved credit I can take. It was good to read that well after that mediocre stint in Oswego. Despite Goldbarth and Hathaway I still look forward to Cornell with apprehension. Baxter certainly did a lot with Epoch over the years. His son Bill was a student of mine at Montana. Now teaching at LSU. Introduced me last year there, about this time. Hot and muggy and I was missing the playoff games just like now. Charming man at Cornell—Rosenberg. Edgar Rosenberg. I wonder if he's still there. Mike McClintock at Montana spoke with such affection and admiration of him. It's good to be old enough to admit your love of baseball and not care a damn what anyone else thinks about it. Jesus God I remember 25 years ago that artsy fartsy crowd I fell in with in Seattle—oh, that was way back. I like Oswego and Wells but fear Cornell. I must be the Paul Harvey of poetry. Sorry Archie won't be there. What a strong decent man—makes me proud just to be in the same racket. That's his word, 'racket'. "Dick, did you ever get up in front of a big crowd to read your poems and say to yourself 'How did I ever get into this fucking racket.' " Talked to Ripley and she said Matthew had taken a call from Howard Moss who wants to get in touch with me. That can't be. Must be Stanley Moss. I barely know Howard, just met him once briefly. Aurora is about as removed from harm as one can get. I doubt cancer would be permitted inside the city limits. This is the world with all harm removed forever. Oswego was where the harm happened long ago and now they are living the sad aftermath. Breakfast with the Bennetts and Mildred at 9:00. I'd love to stay here forever and fish in the lake with Bruce in his back yard. By the time I hit Syracuse I should be as automatic and spiritless as a Morse code instructor. Why wasn't Nesselhoff there tonight? Rumor is Al Poulin is very sick. Nobody mentioned Sexton today—I mean yesterday. Late.
8:30 a.m. Not nearly enough sleep. It would have been a nice gesture of hospitality if one of those sweet girls had slipped into the Prophet's Chambers this morning. Where are the groupies of yesteryear? For all that publicity we get on the grapevine, in the ten years I was single I got laid only four times while on readings. Once in New York, once in Portland, twice in Binghamton. Couple of times I struck out when booze had chilled the seed. Not a bad record considering I'm fat, bald, timid, have as much charm as a badger and reek of Right Guard. Mildred is offended that I carry my laundry around in a laundry bag. Where in hell am I supposed to carry it? In my ear? This desk must be over 100 years old. I'm charmed by tradition when I come east. I even lap up the seriousness and reverence afforded poets. None of that "My wife writes a little poetry" crap we get out west. But I love the west and one reason is that unlike this room and all others from Chicago east, the rooms there are kept cool and livable. God damn it is hot in here. Even that nice new room I read in last night was too hot. Cornell in a few hours. Goldbarth will save me from the nasties. Like having Groucho Marx on your side. Bruce Bennett told me last night about Englishmen living in Florence who remark aloud that Italy is a great country because there one can still find good servants cheap. Those awful democracies ruined so much that's good and right. They needn't worry. Soon they'll find all the servants they want. Some with Ph.D's. What a nightmare is on the way. I need some breakfast. I'm getting gloomy.

12:00 Noon. Recorded a couple of poems. Met Nesselhoff briefly. Seemed older than I'd expected but the light was tricky in his office. Had a good breakfast with the Bennetts and Evan the baby. The ham at the inn is as good as they say. Aurora Inn goes back to 1833. That's only 30 years after Lewis and Clark started west. Some sense of continuum one gets here. History is so recent out west. Who believes L & C were in all those places the signs claim? Mildred will be by soon. Why do I remember Cornell as a place where one is led to feel he doesn't matter? Had a good wild day with Bob Friedman there. What a sweetheart. Hope I see him soon. Baxter, Archie, Rosenberg and—Katz, that's his name, novelist Steve Katz. I wonder if he's there still. No one there I don't like, but I still have the nagging feeling—oh, what the hell. It's just a place and I'm just a poet, so stop the bullshit. Goodbye, naive, innocent, sheltered sweet girls. Stay that way as long as you can. In 15 years I'll be grown up myself and won't be able to write a lick anymore.
3:35 p.m. Ithaca. I feel better already. Mildred drove me down and occasionally her mind strayed to trivialities like the car, the road and where the hell we were. Drove through Ithaca and came back miles and got lost a couple of more times. She gives me a sense of the past, hers and Ripley's, that is different from the one Ripley gives, but obviously the same past is there. Immediately I ran into Goldbarth and Robert Morgan talking in the hall. No waiting. We go out to lunch. Great seeing Goldbarth again, and there's something touching and substantive about Morgan. I'm sorry to hear Norton didn't take his new book. The Red Owl was pretty good I thought. Morgan is a shy boy from the country. Had the best hamburger ever in the east, good enough to have been made in the west. Cornell seems much more human than I remember it. Students not so well dressed, not taking themselves so seriously—that's a vague impression at best. Years ago, people didn't trust others who were poorly dressed. Now we don't trust people who are dressed too good. Did Watergate do all that? The counter-culture change our values? No. I think I'm just getting smart. If I wore a tie to a creative writing class—oh, not a very good idea. I trust people who don't care about dress or styles and who dress as if however they are dressed is a matter of complete indifference to them. I must trust myself. I read at 8:00. I hope I'm as good as last night. No sense spooking myself. Bless them. A room at the Ramada Inn with color TV and the playoffs on. A's 1, Orioles 0, sixth. It works perfectly and it's an Admiral. What happened to Admiral? At lunch the waitress asked, “Aren't you reading tonight?” How did she know? “Because,” she said pointing at Albert and Bob, “they are poets.”

Thursday, October 10. 12:20 a.m. Far far better than I could have ever imagined. Big crowd and a good one. Goldbarth introduced and was funny and I felt relaxed going on. Read well but my voice rose too high at times. Hung in there though. My timing was fine. Baxter and Sherry Hathaway were there. Big party at the Hathaways after, with many fascinating people, Diane Ackerman (glamorous and forbidden), Jack McConkey. David Walker from Field was at the reading but not at the party. And from way back in those grim days at Iowa City, Judy Epstein. She had seen me at my very worst. Now, after all these years I got a chance to talk to her, to explain that lousy time and how ashamed I felt long afterward. God, she was nice about it all. Afterward, I felt like I'd taken a bath in sweet oil. I feel free and strong. A real cutie named Marion at the party. So young and lovely. My loneliness is working. Played with all kinds of ideas involving Marion, also Diane, also Judy and in all cases room 110, Ramada
Inn. But I ended up with Mocha Chip ice cream and a late movie that bored me. God I am dull. Colgate tomorrow. A football power in the 30's. Their scores were always given on radio. And Dexter Roberts, colleague at Montana, went there. Breakfast with Bob Morgan tomorrow. Then Albert and Diane will take me to Hamilton (Colgate). Something wild about Diane but kept private.

5:00 a.m. Terrible dream. I was back working at Boeing and was being pressured to go to Mars. I had quit teaching but my salary for going to Mars was exactly the same as my salary for teaching.

7:00 a.m. Do what you can. Do what you can.
We have the results of the cardiogram.

8:00 a.m. I must get more sleep somehow, somewhere. Maybe this weekend. My God I'll bet Baxter knows Ripley and in all the confusion I forgot to ask him. Rich Jorgenson was there last night. I'd just seen him in Boulder before I left. How could I ever imagine I wouldn't like Cornell? Isn't some standardization taking place? Are students here so much different than at Montana or Colorado? Last night someone told me Milt Kessler at Binghamton has the gout. Morgan due any minute.

10:20 a.m. Fine breakfast with Bob at Noyes Lodge overlooking Beebe Lake and the spillway. I recall being there years ago with Archie. I miss home even if I am saturated with charm. Archie and Jim Wright don't read anymore. Maybe I should quit too. After next spring. Stafford still at it though. Maybe reading and my naturally infantile nature help keep me young. Down to one shirt for tomorrow. Then a washing and we start again. I find Morgan an endearing man. His country shyness and quiet ways are captivating. A man one would never tire of. Very very real, as we say. Colgate soon. Bruce Berlind will be host. I like him already because he gave Vi Gale a good review in Poetry on her first book. I wonder what the writing program will do here when Baxter retires? They'll need a strong director, someone who can hold his own with the academics. The writing programs are beginning to pose a real threat to traditional education and even in Montana I've sensed more and more that I'm getting some sort of power I don't really want. I favor the more traditional study of lit yet it's getting obvious that many of the brightest students don't want to risk trivializing their minds the way scholars often appear to do, no matter how unintentionally. Am I
a traitor because I favor the academic study, bad as I was at it? Anyone would have to admit that English departments can get along without writing programs but not without Shakespeare. The writing programs are a humanizing influence though—I really believe that. How many lit profs have I met who have given up their humanity if they ever had any. And how many act as if literature exists so they can make a living. On to Colgate.

2:40 p.m. But not really. My watch has stopped. All thanks to Bulova and the 165 dollars of mine in their grubby fists. Maybe 5:00 or later. I've been sleeping soundly upstairs at the Berlinds in Hamilton, N.Y. Had lunch with Diane Ackerman and Albert Goldbarth in village of De Ruyter, another charmer among the many towns and villages I've seen. A good lunch in a homey little cafe. Great soup, plus vegetables and polish sausage. In daylight, Diane turns out not to be the glamorous sex object she seemed last night but a good humored down to earth girl who wears too much makeup. A congenial time. Lots of funny remarks. Lots of laughter. Albert gives me a copy of *January 31*. I'm on the dust jacket with some raving rhetoric. What the hell. If you like a poet why not unfurl a banner or two. Seems a shame I can't spend more time with Albert and Diane. Then around 1:20 Mary Berlind greeted us in her home, which dates back to 1840, the additions to 1930 or so. A beautiful house and despite the fact I'm bushed, I can't help noticing how attractive and gracious Mary Berlind is, in a way that no young girl ever is, the kind of woman you wish you'd always been smart enough to love instead of just lately when you got old enough to know what in hell it's all about. Like Ripley, though not in personality, but the same humane lovely qualities. I just woke up from a dream. I was one of a group headed downhill to a port that looked like Maratea Porto in Italy where I lived for awhile. It was a long way to go and I was terribly anxious. A young blonde girl who seemed to be my niece or daughter (what a square dreamer) told me she knew where my car was, the one I'd forgotten I had. It was close by and she had the keys and I felt great relief. When I woke up I had to pee and had an erection. I'm as interesting and complicated as table salt.

7:00 p.m. Dinner with the Berlinds and Peter Redgrove, the English poet who is teaching here this year. Bruce seemed a bit precious at first but I've lived too long in Montana. As the dinner went on he became more and more touching. Peter shy, as are many Englishmen, and charming. I feel rested and relaxed. Fine meal. Duck. Mary turns out to be nobody's fool when she cooks. Everything was very good and the dessert was elegant. Maybe I'm too relaxed. Can I get up for the reading?
Friday, October 11. 1:00 a.m. The audience was young and attentive and the room was a medium-sized classroom. Just the reading I needed after that strange delightful room at Cornell full of people and statues, classical statues with listeners hidden between among and under them. I read very relaxed tonight. My voice was strong and low and I didn't push at all. I could have gone on easily for another hour. A few students came over afterward to the Berlinds' and we had a relaxed evening. The low keyed is just what I need tonight. My timing got sloppy a little tonight mainly because I kept losing concentration. But the get-together was perfect after that splendid crush at Baxter's last night. Bruce is very relaxed with the students and they obviously admire him very much. I think he gives students confidence the way the late Jim Hall did at Washington. Makes them think they are capable of understanding anything. That's a gift. I wish I had it. I'm afraid I give the impression that I don't understand anything and by the time we're finished neither will they. Bruce is quite high on Redgrove's work and lent me a few books. I'll try to read some poems in the morning. Somewhere along the line I thought I saw some sadness here, in the Berlinds, and it endeared them to me or me to them—I never could get that verb straight. There's something admirable about the Berlinds. Whatever this sadness, disappointment, whatever, is, they are people who would never show it overtly or let it affect the way they treat others. That is admirable. Never to take whatever bugs you out on others. I feel oddly close to them but if I said so they'd think it strange after such short acquaintance. I suppose it is. What in hell am I, some sensitive novelist?

2:35 a.m. Can't sleep. Took a triaval. Sleeping schedule is way off. I must not get dependent on triaval.

8:40 a.m. Dead tired. Turns out Redgrove is good at times, very good. But he does suffer from that inability of the English to distinguish a poem from literature—

To sate on writhing passages of scenery

And sometimes he gets completely haywire:

Seed themselves to seed the seed of seeding seeds.
Mary gave me an affectionate peck on the cheek for a goodbye and it meant more than I suppose it should. I suppose it's just that she's a good woman and I'm lonely and her kiss, unsexual as it was, was also reassuring. I am worthy of being loved. No matter what I say, or do.

From Redgrove I learned W. S. Graham is back writing again. God, what a good poet he was. I was in Cornwall in '68 and went to the library in St. Ives to find out where he lived. You can find the address of any poet in England at the public library—maybe you can do that here. I didn't go see him, the admiring American fan. Later in London I heard his drinking was advanced and he was in a pathetic state, so it was just as well. But someone should tell him how very good, how really excellent *The White Threshold* and *The Nightfishing* are. I remember that poetry conference in London when the young Englishman said how awful *The Nightfishing* was. It couldn't be understood. It didn't speak to 'the people,' and Jim Dickey whispered in my ear, "How marvelous," meaning the book. That's good news that he's at it again, but I shouldn't expect too much. If you lay off a long time it's hard to pick up.

*Oneonta*, 11:35. John Sastri drove me down. His mother is secretary of the English Department at Colgate, and his father owns a restaurant in some nearby town, nearby to Hamilton. It struck me as we were leaving Hamilton that I'd never seen Colgate and it must be beautiful. It's on a hill, but I don't even know what it looks like since this morning it was in fog. Sastri majored in math with a philosophy minor at Boston College. He is very rural. He said whenever people spoke of New York they always were speaking of the city and there's more to New York than that. He is proud of rural New York and I don't blame him. No mention of my current book on the posters. Why not? I'm in a lobby on the third floor of the Ed building. Paul Italia, my host, should be here soon.

4:00 p.m. Just woke up after a nap I needed worse than teeth. Charlotte Mendez and I went to lunch on the Oneanta campus. She's a friend of Mildred and a nice girl, quite nervous, and, like me, anxious that people like her. I'm in Lorenzo's Motel, about seven miles east (I think) of town. Hartwick College, also in Oneanta, is having homecoming and the closer motels are packed. Lorenzo's is run by Italians and features, according to Italia, superb Chinese cooking. Why not? The best Chinese restaurant in Portland, Oregon is run by Norwegians. Met Dick Frost briefly on campus. He and I had poems on facing pages in a *TriQuarterly* years ago. His poem is
about some photos of a tour. Mine was “Montesano Revisited,” one
of my favorites. I didn’t remember I’d published that poem in Tri-
Quarterly. God damn but I am old. Ten years ago I knew where every
poem had been published. Of course ten years ago I hadn’t published
so many poems. Dinner with the Frosts tonight. Had a coffee with
Italia before the nap. He is un siciliano, first generation, from the
Bronx. Very energetic, extremely handsome young man, alert, recep-
tive. Really big city: just try to take advantage of me. Had a
good chat with him. We discussed poverty, how it is generated in
America and why here, far more than any other place in the world, it
becomes a sin, a source of shame. Paul thinks, rightly I suppose, that
it’s closely tied to racial bigotry. Paul is a compassionate man, like a
lot of bright New Yorkers I’ve met. It struck me just before I fell
asleep what a tough life Charlotte Mendez has, three children,
divorced eight years. I know marriage isn’t everything but damn it all,
the right husband would make life easier for her. I like her because she
puts out much energy for others and like me, has nothing of what
could be mistaken for character. I can’t stand character. Hitler,
Napoleon, Ghengis Khan all had character and what trouble they
caused, the pricks. The owner of the motel knows who I am. I guess
there was a picture and an article in the local paper. He is impressed.
Don’t be. I wonder if I can watch the series tomorrow in Binghamton
with Milt Kessler, Fred Garber, Phil Dow, Roger Stein. Dear men. It
will be good to see them. One thing about being a poet, you meet so
many interesting and good people. Met the acting chairman briefly,
Graham Duncan. I am dead on my feet. I must concentrate hard
tonight and give a good reading. I dreamed about football fields and
cabbages this afternoon and it was a happy dream but I don’t recall
much of it. Coming to Binghamton, Milt Kessler, you old burly
Brooklyn Jew, Fred Garber, you slight Boston Jew. Remember
fishing from your dock 15 years ago in Lake Washington? Oh, long
ago. Juanita Dow. Marge Barger. Sonny Kessler. I must not get
automatic tonight. Lorenzo, if that’s his name, is very friendly. He
told me there’s a lake nearby, a part of the Susquehanna River and it
has trout, perch, bass, walleye. Cooperstown is only 18 miles away
and I won’t get to see it, and me a baseball nut. But I’ll get to watch the
series tomorrow. Italia says the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown is done
in very good taste and I trust him. “Superman” is on TV. We don’t get
“Superman” in the west, those fool program directors. The acting is
not the best. Here I am worried about giving a good reading and
Superman is catching 16-inch shells in his bare hands in midair and
exploding them before they can land on the island where his friends
cringe in fear. I was never one for values.
11:55 p.m. The reading went well. Surprisingly well, considering I did it in my sleep. Hit a gold mine here in both students and faculty. Duncan is a most decent guy. Dick and Carol Frost are having me to their farm tomorrow to watch the series and stay overnight. Binghamton Sunday. Don Peterson is a huge warm man and was a great help in the audience during the question and answer session afterward. Had dinner with Dick and Carol Frost. He has a slight social eagerness I find disarming and it makes me comfortable. Behind what he says is the unstated tacit notion that we touch and help each other in small important ways. Carol is quieter, very pretty and strong looking. The reserved stuff is New England, I think. Stumbled a couple of times tonight and lost attention for a few lines—I find people don't know when I do that, when I'm not hearing myself but thinking about Ripley or fishing. Read the new poem, "At The Cabin." I hope Moss takes that for the New Yorker. But odds are against it. He gets so many poems.

Saturday, October 12. 8:50 a.m. Woke up way too early here in Lorenzo's. I'll probably be dead after lunch. Feels good to be going to a farm with two nice people. Turns out Richard Howard has been most kind and helpful to Dick Frost too. Richard must surely be the most generous guy going on the scene today. How many people have I met that he's befriended in some very real and helpful way. Lord, he has practically been my literary agent for years, and I'm pleased that, thanks to him, I'm well enough known now not to need his help, to need bother him anymore. I'll never be able to repay him. That dedication in The Lady wasn't nearly enough. I miss Ripley terribly. If some eager coed kidnapped me, I'm sure she'd understand. Where are the groupies of yesteryear? So far, I've detected no one trying to seduce me. But maybe some one has. I console myself with my own insensitivity to love games. If I had been the bartender on the Nile barge, I wouldn't have noticed anything going on between Anthony and Cleopatra.

9:45 a.m. My God, Lorenzo's doesn't open for breakfast. For shame, Lorenzo, and the restaurant is part of the motel complex. I'll eat nothing until after 12:00 when Carol will pick me up. Maybe that's good. I miss the swimming pool at Colorado and can't help but notice I'm getting blimpier and blimpier. Could I take a cab to town? Checkout time at 11:00. An hour outside on my feet in the mean east and me without my Gary Cooper six shooter. Why don't I try hitchhiking? Why don't I relax? I could try a poem.
Why Oswego Reminds Me of Home

Mainly because the wind and gray unite somewhere far out on Ontario and start the long roll shoreward, and because the waves crash white against the rundown carousel.

Oh, stop it for the wind’s wake. No socks. No shirts. One pair of shorts. But the lovely Frosts have a washing machine and a dryer. I’ll go to Binghamton clean as a trout in a high mountain lake. And, with luck, rested. How does that tireless Stafford do it?

11:50 p.m. I can’t believe the developments. It turns out Dick Frost was a jazz drummer, a Dixieland jazz drummer. My God, and that’s my favorite music. He has records and tapes like no one I know. He even has Kid Ory’s “Creole Song.” Oh, I haven’t heard that since Bob Peterson played it for me years ago—where was that, Portland? And I love it. Love Peterson and Dorothy too. How are they, I wonder. For some reason, Bob always knows what I’ll like. Frost has Louis Armstrong doing “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead You Rascal You.” Teagarden doing “I’ve Got A Right To Sing The Blues.” You sure do, Jack baby. Old tapes of the San Francisco station that plays only old tunes, the Dutch Swing College Band. Teagarden’s “Blue River”—I haven’t heard that in 15 years, maybe 20. Oh, oh. I can’t believe it. I have really struck gold. Dick is a fine drummer and he plays a tape of the last performance he did with a German jazz band. He drummed with them for some time when he was in Germany. One of the last numbers, he sings “St. James Infirmary.” He told me the Germans arranged his final gig with them so that he got all the money the club took in that night and did it in such a way he could not refuse it. When he got up to say his goodbyes after months in the band, he couldn’t make the speech he prepared. He just broke down on the stage and cried. Must have been a great moment for him, one he will hoard forever. Shit, I feel like crying just thinking about it—the war and everything, how once we were killing each other—oh, let’s not get silly, Dick. Dick Frost’s poems are quite interesting and he showed me a beautiful one Carol published in a Seneca Review. Harry and Dorothy Bloom joined us for dinner tonight. The Frost children, Daniel and Joel, are delightful. Saw the series too. Oakland 3 to 2. I love the Frosts. I can’t help it. I love them. I asked Dick why Rock and Roll seemed so cold to me, though I like some of it. Why it doesn’t have that humane joy and sadness of Dixieland. He told me
it's because it has no syncopation. That the warmth and affecting quality of Dixieland is due in part to the syncopation. It struck me I miss that in a lot of modern poetry too, even poems I like. A lack of rhythm, which is really finally a lack of feeling. That's due in part to WCW who tried maybe too hard to find an "American rhythm" so we wouldn't be bound to English rhythm anymore. But, due to some of his misguided followers we ended up with damn near no rhythm at all. Anyway, all that literary crap gives me a pain. Jesus God, when I hear poets giving all sorts of literary reasons why they write or write the way they do, I think the world has gone nuts. That stupid idea you learn everything that's gone before and then try to do something new and different. Really different poets try to write the same as others—they just don't quite make it because they can't. How many times have I seen some profound literary statement made by a poet, followed by poems that demonstrate the most usual and predictable sensibility. I digress. It's hard to leave the Frosts. I could stay here forever in this old and charming farmhouse listening to Ory's "Creole Song." If it's the last thing I'll do I'll find that record someday—but I've only seen it on 78. Maybe it's on a 33 long play by now. The Frosts will drive me to Owego, I mean Otego, tomorrow and I'll take a bus to Binghamton.

**Sunday, October 13. 2:50 p.m. Binghamton. Colonial Inn.** Just had lunch with Fred Garber. He looks great and I'm glad to see I'm not the only one balding. God I'm tired. Four to go. All those people to meet, and that I want to meet. Heyen, Poulin, Koch, Hecht, Snodgrass, Booth. And here I have yet to see Phil and Juanita Dow, Liz Hewitt, Milt and Sonny, Marge Garber, Roger Stein. He and Joan are separated. I'm sorry to hear that. Both sweet people. Hate to see a couple bust up when they are both sympathetic. This is the motel I shacked up in years ago. What a long delicious night that was. No sleep but lots of relaxation. I think that was in room 242. This is 276. That's about right. I was 34 years younger then. Dinner tonight with Fred and Marge. Chinese food, right here, part of the motel and rumored excellent. Read tomorrow at 8:15. I'm getting dull from fatigue and meeting too many people. My conversation is as interesting as the Barretts of Wimpole Street. World Series in an hour. Color TV. I wonder if that girl is still around. I am temptable. Where are the groupies of yesteryear?
5:40 p.m. Dodgers 1, A's nothing. Fourth inning. It's good to be alone in the motel watching the series. I've not really despaired for a long time, not even alone like this. I hope I don't have to think in terms of survival anymore. What a change Ripley has made. Donald Hall was so right in his note a few months back when he said we were lucky to get a second chance at life. I remember 20 or 25 years ago in Hudson Review, a reviewer sneered at WCW because he said one wrote poems to be a better person. I remember how sophisticated the reviewer seemed and how I agreed with him. But Hudson and I were wrong and Williams was right. You have to have written poems awhile to know how right Carlos was. The difference was in those days, because of the new critics, art was looked on as the pure object untouched by human hands. Who the fuck did we think were writing poems—giraffes? But WCW was an honest man and he knew what he was talking about. Isn't that exactly what Eliot was hoping for in Prufrock? That if he wrote the poem he would be better than J. Alfred? I'd bet on it. I know it's true. Oh, I am the wise old poet. Anyway, I'm old. 95 today.

11:20 p.m. Dinner with Fred and Marge. Very good Chinese. Got Ripley on the phone. She sounded so damn good to me. Warm. Loving. I am very homesick. Maybe I could feign illness and fly home. Had to take another triavil last night at the Frosts. I can't do that tonight. I just can't. How can I be so tired and yet need drug myself to sleep? Maybe the late movie will be a French film. No one makes me sleep better than the French—their movies do it every time, like a big plate of fried onions. It was good to see Marge looking so well.

Monday, October 14. 8:20 a.m. A sound sleep. Dreamless. Woke up around seven and took no tablet last night. Milt should be here soon. I feel strong this morning, but it's 12 hours before the reading. I hope I'm not dragging by then. Fred has become big in his field, what with the book on Wordsworth and all those articles, plus two books in the making. He travels a lot now and might be in Boulder in November. I'll check with Ed Nolan when I get back. Samuel Eliot Morrison and Willie Mays are on The Today Show this morning. What a nice man Morrison is. I bought Dad his entire history of naval operations in WW II. Following Morrison, flamenco dancing which I loathe. Dancing should never be that serious. Every number starts as if we are about to see King Lear. Except for a good solo hoofer I don't care for dancing much. Off with the Spaniards.
2:50 p.m. A fine breakfast with sweet Burly Milt. Milt’s concerned his book hasn’t been reviewed. Except in a couple of places. I don’t blame him. That’s too good a book to go unnoticed. How often that happens. One of the best books in my collection, *Aegean Islands* by Bernard Spencer, went by with little notice in 1947 or whenever. Ruth Pitter in England. Milt has an interesting idea involving the denial of the normal ways of establishing manhood for Jews and how it affects their writing. No Jew could have written Kinnell’s “The Bear,” he says. I didn’t know Jews could hunt and fish only to obtain food, never for sport. While I have no affection for hunting like I do for fishing, and recognize the reason we ought to limit ourselves, not endanger species and all that, I wonder if the Jewish denial of doing something for any reason but the practical doesn’t deny a silly but essential part of the mind. I know I am never outwitting the trout since the trout has no wits and doesn’t know what in hell I’m doing, but it was fun to think so all those years. Don’t our minds convert reality in those strange ways just to make life more interesting? If I understand Milt he feels that the cultural restraints imposed on Jews limit the amount of material available for development of a stance, a poetics, whatever. I wonder if just being a minority group member and knowing you have an audience rather than a majority group member and knowing you have none, is a hindrance toward development of a poetic system? I mean a way of writing that excites only you at first and, hopefully, others later. I think maybe it has less to do with what class/race/religion you find yourself in and more to do with where you live. I think I don’t know what I’m talking about. Milt’s theory involved the Cossacks. I’m still trying to tie that down. He explained it but my mind is soggy these days. At last, Betsy Hewitt. So lovely, so classy. Do Milt and I become more aware of ‘our humble beginnings’ when around her? If we do it certainly isn’t her doing. I basked for awhile in her charm and her office. Phil Dow came by, and Roger Stein, both looking as healthy as German tourists in Rome. Juanita Dow can’t be in town for the reading. Shame. But I’ll call her and say hello. Roger and Joan ARE living apart. Double shame. But apparently without regret or bitterness. Roger reminded me he knew me in Seattle when I was sweating out getting a first book published. My Lord, has it been that long? Yes, it has. I was 37 then, when my first book came out. Stafford’s came out when he was 47. Bill must be 60. Can that be? Poets never get old. They do die however, just like mortals. Milt gave me a copy of *Clarendon*, the student writing magazine. At last the student writing is good here. A few years ago it was awful. One named Paul Corrigan
writes about fish. Ah, a fellow spirit. I must phone Juanita and say hello. A good woman. How come all villains are men—in real life I mean. Hitler, Ghengis Khan, Xerxes. Not a woman among them. Nixon. Let's not forget him, if we can't. My mind is slipping. I hope I read well tonight with all those dear old friends in the audience. Is every room back here overheated. I damn near died in the student center today. Lady MacBeth? But that's art. A few female ne'er-do-well's in Raymond Chandler. In real life, too, but they are waiting for me to return with the coke I left 30 years ago to get. Lunch with Phil and Milt. Good company always.

October 15. Tuesday. 12:20 a.m. They applauded so hard and long I wondered if the ghost of Yeats hadn't sneaked in behind me on the stage. And a moving tribute from Milt in the introduction. I used to say I might have made it as an actor but I know now I wouldn't have. I understand actors live on applause and, while I like it, it just doesn't mean as much as the way I feel when I'm writing. Donald Hall said this all best in a recent APR. Couldn't hold my concentration at first but things improved. I was best at Wells. Best voice. Best timing. Fred said I was getting professional. The word, dear Fred, is slimy. A good dinner with Milt and Sonny, Betsy, Jack and Jane Vernon. Fred and Marge. There was something familiar about Jane Vernon and it turned out she's Barbara Frick's sister. Barbara was in a class of mine at Iowa and she's good—she was good before she took my class but when I see her poems published I take much credit. There's another of my students. They are pretty sisters, look a lot alike and also like Barbara Stafford. My jacket is soaked with sweat. I must try to sleep without triavil. Milt at 8:30 for breakfast. I'm starting to run on nerves. How do politicians stand it, town after town. How about actors? How can you play the same part eight times a week for two years? I hope Ripley babies me for a year when I get back. Jim Wright was so right in Missoula last time I saw him when he said it's hard for a poet to find a woman who knows and understands what being a poet is like. And I found the best. I can tell how tired and punchy I've gotten because I make verbal noises when I have nothing to say, hoping I won't offend someone with silence. Brockport tomorrow. Four hours on the bus to Rochester where Tony Piccione and Heyen will meet me. I hope I'll be ok. My mind keeps wandering. I'm happy for Milt, for the good writers he's getting. What slim pickings here a few years ago.
7:55 a.m. Dog tired. Six hours sleep. Very humid. The room is stifling. Even after the shower I feel clammy and dirty. I'm looking right past Brockport, Rochester and Syracuse to Ripley and Boulder. It must be hard for women poets to find the right husband, too. Should I quit reading, like Jim and Archie? It is killing. Where are the groupies of yesteryear?

8:20 a.m. Elizabeth Ashley is on The Today Show. Also a couple of authors of books on industrial injuries and diseases. Same old story—collusion of industry and government to avoid humane protective laws. I got tired years ago hoping man might become less depraved. Ashley is getting rave reviews for Cat On A Hot Tin Roof. I never cared for her in the movies. She was awful in Ship of Fools. One day I held the hand of a nice woman, an actress named Patti Jerome, on the plane from Salt Lake to Missoula. Jerome plays now and then on the Newhart show on TV, and was terrified of flying. I couldn't blame her. We were on one of those damned Convair 580's that Frontier runs about the Rockies. The stewardess told Jerome not to worry, that the Convair 580 was the safest plane of all because it could be landed anywhere easily. The only problem is they bounce around so much you find yourself thinking of the options all the time you are in the air. Jerome was so scared she asked me to comfort her so we held hands all the way to Missoula. Jerome was on her way to Livingston to play Sally, of Sally's, in the movie Rancho Deluxe, and she told me how much fun it is to work with Ashley and how she was looking forward to it. Sally's. I must get one of those pencils they put out for advertising: "Sally's. Where The Customer Always Comes First." Ashley is good fun on TV this morning, just like Jerome said. Now it turns out she's a good actress too. It's a good feeling when an artist you thought was lousy turns out to be good.

9:45 a.m. Milton talked about the minimum number of proper nouns in Ignatow's work. He said the city breeds so much pain that people there shut off memory. Is that the problem I have when I have students from big cities—I try to get them to name things and they don't want to?

12:55 p.m. Went well. Now I see how actors do it. They just do it. Find something more inside. Tony Piccione and Bill Heyen were waiting in the bus stop and we roared off to Bill's for lunch. What a great good woman Bill's wife is. Han. Very down to earth, warm, genuinely sweet natured. We stopped off at Al Poulin's on the way to
Tony’s. Poulin is recovering from open-heart surgery necessitated by blood clots. They tell me he never exercises, is so driven he often sits in one position for 20 hours studying and writing. Even laid up, his body covered by a form-fitting stocking under his clothes, his mind can’t stop buzzing. Reminds me a bit of John Hawkes, that same obsessive, and in the best sense, slightly mad music going on in his mind. Boo Poulin is beautiful, of Greek heritage, but very level-eyed and candid when she speaks. I doubt she has ever ‘used’ her looks the way Greek sirens do. Al seems to express a lot of opinions and I’d guess his opinions change often. Tony’s wife, Sandy, cooked lasagne for dinner. That didn’t break my heart. It was excellent. She knows how to cook. She’s Jewish, it turns out. Nearly everyone here in the east seems Jewish or Italian—I guess as groups go they are my two favorite. But then in poetry circles you meet awfully nice folks. The best people I’ve met as far as groups go are black jazz musicians, or maybe just jazz musicians. I ramble. A’s 3. Dodgers 2. I watched some of the game at Poulin’s following the reading. Logan came over from Buffalo. Oh, it was good to see John again. I ran up into the audience and embraced him as he walked in. John is fat. Looks like a man who has been seeking and getting gratification and who is also paying for it. A good audience. But then I’ve had no bad ones this trip. They really take poets and poetry seriously back here. Turns out the rumors about John’s drinking are overblown. He sticks pretty much to wine and doesn’t start the day too early. His doctor told him his liver is hanging in there. Good news. Tony and Patti Petrosky, editors of Rapport, were there at dinner and at the reading. A lot of solid young people over from Buffalo. Some came with John. John is such a good teacher. He always ends up with students who are good writers—a lot of that because of himself. Tomorrow I do a TV tape with Tony and Bill Heyen. I called Ripley. God but I miss her and the kids. I must get some sleep tonight. I’ve been signing autographs since I got here. They really take poets seriously. Now, out west . . .

Wednesday, October 16. 7:55 a.m. Not nearly enough sleep for the day ahead. TV tape at 10:30. Then Rochester. Maybe I’ll meet Hecht today. Robert Koch will pay me today. Maybe that will give me strength. Is money blood? God I heard interesting things yesterday. Turns out Han’s father was a German captain killed at Stalingrad when she was four. Houghton Mifflin is going to publish Poulin’s translations of the Duino Elegies that APR printed and that I used in the Rilke course last year. How many poets have told me about all the
ass you get on these tours. I always feel like I am the type who ends up
at the chairman's house commiserating with the Spenserian over the
decline of academic standards. Academic standards. The last refuge
of scoundrels. Why is it those who worry about academic standards
are so often the dullest minds in the business, the most boring
teachers, the pedantic drudges. I wish I had more time here. Breakfast
this morning with Bill and Han. That's good news about HM doing
Poulin's translations. They are fine, read like poems. One thing he
did, he told me, was shorten the sentences, make two and three out of
one of the German. A smart thing to do. I am moving in a blinding
fog, groping toward Friday and the Syracuse airport, and home to
Ripley. One clean shirt left in the bag. I'll wear this one I've got on at
Syracuse and Rochester, then use the clean one to go home. Hello,
Ripley. Here's my dirty laundry. How about a welcome kiss?

3:00 p.m. Rochester. Tony drove me up. Breakfast with Bill, Han
and Tony, then the TV thing. Bill and Tony gave me a lot of support
and strength up there under the glaring lights. After the taping we
watched the show. It wasn't bad though I squinted a lot. Lord I'm old.
Sagging chin, less hair than I thought. We grow old, John Logan. We
grow old. We shall wear our high school annuals soiled. Where are
the groupies of yesteryear? I am punchy. I'm in an ex frat house, now
called the Medieval House, in a fine guest room. Where are the
torture racks? The dungeons? My host, Leroy Searle, is sure a good
guy. He even carried my bag all the way over here for me. Dinner
tonight with the Searles, Ramseyes, and a couple of writing students.
Can I nap now? I need to. Why do poets complain about these
readings? I've been treated wonderfully everywhere I've gone. Two to
go. Tonight. Tomorrow. All done. I'll be flying home to Ripley. It
seems a year since I left.

5:20 p.m. Did I nap? I don't think so though the time between 4 and
4:45 went fast. Searle will be here in 20 minutes. Can I do it one more
time? Twice more? I'm regressing to my old habit of hearing no one,
of listening to my own self inside. I hope people don't notice. Could
they understand that I did that as a child, shut out one world and
listened only to my inner self to make sure I survived? That terrible
necessary withdrawal. It returns now and then. I want to reach out,
most of all to Ripley, to let her know how very much I love her. But
I'll probably go to my grave hearing only myself, shutting others out
even with my final breath. What is this melodramatic crap. Just
because I'm too tired to hold attention to what others say. Christ
sake, I'm just tired, that's all. Not hopelessly withdrawn. I hope the Dodgers win tonight so I can see at least one game at home Saturday. Jerry Ramsey tonight. Bill Matthews speaks of him with such fondness. At Brockport they told me this is a rich school but it looks a lot older than the other SUNY's. Or is it a SUNY? Take a bus tomorrow to Syracuse. Wait a minute. Koch is here. This is where I get paid. I've been years away from Boulder. Centuries from Montana. I truly think we should live in one, no more than two places all our lives. People who live a real long time, live to be 140, always seem to come from places where nothing changes and no memory is necessary. Do I know that? I think so. I think that's right. A memory isn't needed because things are just the way they always were. Is it the internationalization that Rilke speaks of, the psychic hoopla we have to go through to make sure "what thou lovest well, remains" that takes too much toll finally? We kill ourselves with changes and improvements. Stagnancy is life's ally. That's sad. That's just awfully sad.

Tuesday. October 17. 12:30 a.m. The reading went ok though I lost my timing at first, a simple failure of concentration. A nice party at Leroy and Annie Searle's. Jerry Ramsey and Dorothy were there. The dinner before the reading was nice but I was boorish—I can't help but go back to old selves when I tire. The writing students were sweet. At some point shortly after I picked up a small dish of whatever from the salad bar I realized I was eating squid, and I didn't like it. A glorious girl named Carolyn was at the reading, later at the party. What a doll. Oh, down down, you dirty old man. May I get dirtier with each passing day. What gorgeous women there are. Carolyn. What a beauty. I got into some stupid argument with a woman over nothing, like I was in grad school or something. I never argue. It's a waste of time. I am not myself anymore. Rather I am my former self and I don't like that one. It's a shame to be like that when nice people like the Searles and Ramseys are about. Bob Koch gave me the money and will pick me up at 9:30 for breakfast. Girl named Beth Jennifer Jarvey wants to be remembered to Bill Matthews. I'm so worn. So tired of meeting people though they have been wonderful to me. It just struck me that I'm losing a sense of whom I meet. And the Searles and Ramseys are interesting and good people. I sense that but I know I cannot experience them. I am out of gas. I am inside myself. A man at the reading tonight was at the reading last night in Brockport. That's flattering. I fear he got the same show. One to go. Only one. Then home. Win tomorrow, Dodgers. Save one game for home. I'm sorry Ripley but if that luscious Carolyn had just snapped
her fingers tonight—what a dreamer. I'm older than her father, I'll bet. Goddam it, I'm hard up, tired and homesick. Anthony Hecht never showed up. Sorry to have missed him. A couple of people I don't know who irritated me at the party. That's a sure sign I'm pooped, when people irritate me. I'm very edgy, and my sociability is forced. It's a shame. With good people like the Searles and the Ramseys about, and Bob Koch. Heyen and Poulin are wrong: Sealtest isn't that much worse an ice cream than Breyer's.

1:20 a.m. Damn it. Had to take a triavil. How can I be this tired and need help to sleep?

9:10 a.m. I'll say this for triavil, if you use it you are refreshed when you wake. As Satch Page would say, I've got the juices jangling. Jerry Ramsey told me Hecht's health has been bad and that's why he didn't come to the reading, probably. I'm sorry he's sick. Koch will be here soon. He just remarried too. One to go. Tomorrow, I wing home.

1:10 p.m. Syracuse. The sweethearts. I read at 4:30. And nothing is planned afterward. William Wasserstrom and I passed each other three times in the bus station. I thought he didn't look like anyone named William Wasserstrom, and he thought I didn't look like a poet. So even if the Dodgers lose, I still get to see the final game. Oh, lovely Syracuse. Snodgrass will pick me up at 4:00 but Booth is on leave. How sad to miss him. He sent me such a generous note a year or so ago. Had an interesting breakfast with Bob Koch this morning. We talked about Xerox and Kodak, how this might be a pretty good country if all corporations were as humane and civic minded as they are. But of course you can't have a civilization dependent on the benevolence of some damned business firm—not for long. And not for long is right. We talked about Watergate, too, how we understood people like Erlichman and Haldeman, how we had seen people growing up out of the depression able to distort morality through misuse of language because the plain crude talk of the poor just wasn't adequate. They had a chance to be middle class, to never return to the threat of destitution and they took it. It meant learning (or making up) a new language, and it happened to our generation. No wonder the kids found us phony when they grew up, able to misrepresent reality to insure financial stability. Of course a few of us didn't make it but that was just lack of talent. We became commercial fishermen or poets. Romantic but perhaps no more laudatory.
3:25 p.m. The bastards. The pricks. No room service though the restaurant is part of the motel. I need coffee. I must wake up after that nap. In one hour I read and then it is over. All over. Finished. No one to meet. No party to go to. They seem less hospitable here than elsewhere. When I told Wasserstrom I had to be at the airport at 6:30 tomorrow he said I'd have to get a cab—as if it were out of the question that anyone would or could take me. That's ok. It's part of the same attitude that gives me the night off, the chance to see the series. Levine was here last week. That's a tough act to follow. Such a wonderful poet AND reader. That 1933 is as beautiful a book as I've seen come out in this country. What book was ever more moving? I sloberred around the house for an hour after I'd finished it. It seems a year since I saw Ripley, Matt, Melissa. Tomorrow I'm going to relax like dead kelp on the beach. If there's ground fog, and delay here, or at O'Hare, I'll run screaming "The Wright Brothers are Mothers" through the airport. Wasserstrom gave me a pamphlet on the writing program here. I wish we had their money for assistantships, fellowships, scholarships at Montana. George P. Elliott is here. We used to publish in Accent 20 years ago. I see Booth, Snodgrass and Elliott have had Guggenheims. A novelist here, Sally Daniels, and a Donald Dike who edited Delmore Schwartz's essays. I wish I kept up, and knew who people are. But who does, except Richard Howard? Stafford maybe. I'm on soon and I'm not awake. Beautiful wind outside. Leaves gyrating. Windows rumbling like thunder over the border. And rivers moving more in dream than real must be ruffled. The Erie Canal in Brockport. Lake Ontario, where I started years ago and not far from here. Wells with all the harm removed. Sad Oswego. The wind makes my mind move everywhere.

7:45 p.m. It's over. Done. Christ what a grind. It went well too. Where does the energy come from? Maggie Gratzer had me to dinner. She's a Montana girl I met some time back. She's a good friend of Dennice Scanlon and was pleased I've been trying to help Dennice get a book published. God almighty but Dennice is good. Maggie is married to a Hungarian named Miklos. Carolyn Wright, a writing student from Seattle, was along. Snodgrass turned out to be a warm giving man. Elliott very handsome and gracious, though like many people here in the east, a bit reserved. Jay Meek was in the audience. Man named Bob Hursy, I think, a friend of Liz Libbey. Dear old Liz. There's another good poet. She and Dennice were both undergrads in my class, the same class. What two powerhousees. Someone I vaguely recall I had a beer with in Iowa City. I had a lot of beers in Iowa City.
Home tomorrow. Oh, baby. Maggie will drive me to the airport. That is sweet of her. She has to get up extra early to do it. Wasserstrom announced my title as The Lady in Kicking River Reservoir. That’s ok, Bill. I’m too old to be temperamental and besides that’s a damn good title. The series starts in a moment. Bless Syracuse.

11:00 p.m. The A’s again. Now I must get up at 5:30 to catch the plane. What a pleasure that will be. Ripley, my love, I’m on my way. The next entry should be in Boulder.

Friday, October 18. 4:15 p.m. Boulder. It was enough to make you believe in God. Out of Syracuse on time and out of O'Hare only 15 minutes late. But before we get too religious, let’s consider Stapleton Airport in Denver. Who the hell is running it, the Three Stooges? I was fuming. We sat there for minutes blocked by another plane and just off our right wing were three empty parking places we could have used but no, we had to wait for the assigned stall and we were blocked. And Ripley waiting for me inside the airport. May TWA be taken over by Infantile Airlines. May TWA and Stapleton Airport go down in history as Hitler’s favorites, as Nixon’s favorites. I was short-tempered and surly. Poor Ripley. She’s so damned understanding and it is wonderful to be back with her. I’ll be damned if I ever leave her this long again. Now I’ve had a nap and am not only nice to Ripley but I even forgive TWA and Stapleton. And what about the tour? What comes back? Certainly the waters, Lake Ontario, Lake Cayuga, Lake Beebe, the Erie Canal, the leaves flaring everywhere, the thousands of beautiful homes, the sense of a stable continuum, most of all the humane people I met everywhere. I feel vaguely that for all the fatigue, even the disorientation I felt now and then, I’ve been enriched, given the chance to think that poetry is in good hands and, because of the students I met, will be for a long time. Some things I didn’t note that come to me now. How often Lewis Turco was spoken of with admiration, not just at Oswego, but at other schools. He is a kind of leader, licensed by his energy and devotion. The sour news that started this journal is still sour. It always will be. I talked about Sexton with several people but didn’t jot any of it down. Not many theories, and plenty of sadness and distress. Along the line somewhere, someone remarked that Sexton had, by upping her reading fees, helped isolate herself from those who admired and understood her and made herself available only to crowds that regarded her as a novelty or a freak. I like to think we can keep each
other alive, some of us. But that's naive. We know nothing about suicide, so why speculate? I only wish she could have found the reassurance I just did, the reassurance that my life is important. I always knew that, but it's nice to have the knowledge reinforced by a lot of good people, as well as by poems. Her life was important too, because it was a life and was hers. I wish she could have felt that deep enough to still be with us. But why get foolish. She's gone and we are left with what she did and what she was. Five minutes after I arrived home, Marilyn Thompson called and asked me if I'd like to read in Glenwood Springs. Her timing could have been worse. She could have called four minutes after I got home.

_Saturday, October 19. 9:50 a.m._ We are refusing all social invitations. I just counted my money. I am gloating like a miser.