

CHILDHOOD'S MYTH

childhood, looking
back on it, has
the quality of
primitive myth.
not "the sunflower", or
"narcissus"; but myth
as it is *lived*,
as the means of
apprehension, before
any alphabet
teaches
sequential thought;
when the world is rich
in secrets, sacred
stones and groves and pools:
wonders
that have nothing to do
with data,
meaning
that has nothing
to do with use.

the children we were
have long gone under:
so far
from the present they seem,
we may easily hold them
fictitious, incredible
("mythical" in the trite sense
of the word).

but
the legends concerning them
plainly ring true:
the symbols remain
large, dark,
compelling;
inhabiting
one fluid, filmic
memory;

immanent.

*

a particular catastrophe
i do not remember,
but at a certain period
the gods departed.
stern, stern, sepia gods
they were: mustachio'd
faces; earls and admirals:
inherited cigarette cards
their icons.
k of k, lord french
of ypres, and haig (no butcher)
of bemersyde; many
another: a veritable pantheon.

once,
i recited those names
like the names of the lord
in a hindu prayer:
hare this and hare that . . .
ad infinitum.

*

and yet,
at a certain period
(dates could be given to
pin the time down),
the icons vanished,
the gods very definitely
departed.
a late tradition,
of doubtful provenance,
declared they had not
disappeared
entirely, merely
(for reasons unknown)
withdrawn. their carlsbad
caverns, a cupboard
in the bathroom,
above where the towels
and the sheets were kept:
a region forbidden
to the children of the family;

but any earnest seeker
on a kitchen chair
might wake them.

*

many years later, when
moving to a different home,
of alien myths,
my job
was to clear
that mysterious place.
i found many long-lost
odds and ends, but not one
solitary
cigarette card.

*

i have come
to accept my parents'
account (a contemporary
source, regrettably not
discredited by modern research),
which states:

at an early age, perfectly aware
that what you were doing
was probably wrong,
with the scissors
from the big blue box with the buttons
(kept, you remember, in the bathroom
cupboard, above where the towels
and the sheets were put)

you cut them all to pieces.