

# C É Z A N N E



M O R R I C R E E C H

1.

The man with brush and palette knife  
Watches the gleaming light of Aix.  
A scrim of cloud goes skimming by.  
If it is a solitary life  
To paint with brush and palette knife  
The spheres, the cones, and cylinders  
Of nature in a layered light,  
Then this is the man and these the right  
Structures and geometric shapes  
To see things by. The colors shift  
Beneath the essences distilled  
Of mountain, orange, pine, or peach.  
The world and his perception rhyme  
On a canvas of arrested time.

2.

An ancient sun has shed its blue.  
Here the wind goes slow, then still,  
Beneath a smear of deeper brown  
On rooftops at the edge of town.  
A balding man stands on the hill.  
He sees the sea, shades it the hue  
Of consciousness, with strokes of white,  
One island like a far meringue.  
To set things down the way they seem  
And get the sullen colors right,  
Shape of a woman's folded hands  
Or oranges wrapped in swaddling bands,  
Those stray folds where the shadows start,  
Are all his labor and his art.

3.

Paint the colors, paint them on  
The quiet hills at dusk or dawn.  
Paint Harlequin and Pierrot.  
Whatever else the angels do,  
None whispers in a bishop's ear  
Or crowds by an important chair.  
None wears a father's leather shoe.  
They do not natter in the blue  
Of ordinary fields. The mind  
Grows anxious in its search to find  
Some meaning in the daub of day.  
When the paint of thought is scraped away  
It reveals not the world we know  
But another, deeper, just below.

4.

Celestial things have no place here.  
The commonest will do: a pear,  
A bottle, two eggs, a loaf of bread,  
A man whose beard and sober head  
Display the changes of the year.  
He shifts a bit to adjust his view,  
The man with brush and palette knife,  
In a world of shifting constancies.  
Though in the teeth of time and change  
He has managed to arrange  
Permanent shapes that will outlast  
The subjects that decay so fast,  
His apples rot as the paint dries.  
He hears the buzzing of the flies.

5.

The real is what we think it is:  
 Melting snow at Fontainebleau,  
 Lavender touched by morning dew.  
 It is a man in a white-stained cap  
 Who holds his brushes in his lap  
 And works to make his vision true.  
 But atoms in the clearest air  
 Compose the easel and the chair  
 Where he paints, that man from Aix.  
 Each brushstroke makes it seem as though  
 Aqueduct, garden, and chateau  
 Are motions in a stillness, bare  
 And rinsed, a smutch of white and green,  
 Until one sorts what one has seen.

6.

Sensation is the aim of thought.  
 It is a matter for the eye  
 That one's perspective alters sky  
 From gray to cobalt by device,  
 That one can see the same thing twice,  
 Three, no, a hundred times, and note  
 A difference in the dusky hues  
 Each time the pupil takes it in.  
 Let's paint the familiar thing again.  
 Let's watch the steel blue at L'Estaque  
 Become, on second glance, the black  
 Of heavy clouds, late winter, when  
 Perception sees the shapes unwind  
 Before they reach the shaping mind.

7.

An atmosphere of autumn light  
Against a backdrop of green pines,  
Old woman with a rosary,  
A bather slumped against a tree,  
The chateau on the hill at night  
Are all a part of his designs,  
The man from Aix. He shuts his eyes.  
And what he sees is past surmise.  
Behind the eyelids' crucial dark,  
The imagined and the real  
Blend to what we think and feel.  
He blinks and makes a final mark.  
Shapes appear as they appear.  
The shadows, lengthening, grow near.