You realize that this is no reprieve
But merely a delay?
The comedy must end. The way it ends
Has just been put off to another day.
Perhaps two months from now, perhaps two years,
It will be known to family and friends
That you, at last, are more dead than alive,
With nothing left to say.
When any tears there are will be their tears,
Not yours, the wave of silence will arrive
With which you leave.

So this must be the storm before the lull,
These webs of words
Slowly assembled at the summer’s peak
Here in the portico of your downfall,
As you sit watchfully to count the birds –
So few beside the Heathrow rush of spring –
Which in the garden briefly peck and preen
Before continuing
To Finland, Iceland, Baffin Land, wherever:
Your chance to speak before you never speak
Again, your next to final scene.

This peace, which will be perfect by and by,
Came out of chaos. When the drugs went wrong
It almost seemed a burden not to die
As I shared that Babelic rumpus room
With the trouser thief and the lady with one song
She sang forever. Racing, my brain teemed
With stuff to tell the doctors so they might
Unbolt the door, but that place was a tomb
Sealed tight. I ate my sleeping pills and dreamed
Of all I could have had –

The happiness I wasted. Now, set free,
I see that my whole life
Had been a greedy fever. A sad spell
Of frenzy only summed it up. My wife
And daughters built this studio for me
In which I read and write and rest. They know
Something ill-mended in my mind demands
I live alone. And so they come and go
To help me do that, and so all is well,
As I wait for the day the last bird lands
And nightfall finally

Blankets my vision of this bright arcade.
Outside, in that cane chair,
I sat to read *The Faerie Queene* and found
Garbled accounts of knights and damsels made
Melodic sense, in verse as light as air.
On this desk, crowded as a burial mound
With treasured papers, my Chinese notebook,
Full of unfinished thoughts, will still be there,
When I, at last, can’t reach it. Should things look
As if I knew despair, of this be sure:
I loved it here.