The Writer

Richard Wilbur, 1921

In her room at the prow of the house

Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,

My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing

From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys

Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff

Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:

I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,

As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.

A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,

And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor

Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling

Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;

How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;

And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,

We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature

Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove

To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,

For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits

Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,

Beating a smooth course for the right window

And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,

Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish

What I wished you before, but harder.