

And Hine [*Daylight Saving*], last only because I know him least, and never met him. As witty and ingenious as any poet now writing, and certainly more suave and skillful at his gymnastics than anyone since Auden. The sheer dexterity of the poems deserves acclaim. For all three, much thanks. And much praise to you and Kathleen and the House of Atheneum itself, which seems a tower of literary strength. [. . .]

Tony

June 10, 1978 Rochester NY

[To Harry Ford]

Dear Harry,

Thanks for your note about "The Short End," and for the honesty and candor of your comment. Your dismay consorts with the reaction of the three people, not counting Helen, who have seen it so far, and who have had no trouble containing their enthusiasm. It has been in the hands of Howard Moss for about two weeks and I have heard nothing. But if his reaction conforms to those I've had, I would guess that he has not yet returned it only out of embarrassment at too swift a rejection. My own confidence in it has been a good deal shaken.

But I've not completely lost faith in it. Admittedly, and indeed, deliberately, this is a different sort of poem from any I've written. You wonder, in your note, whatever gave me the idea to write it. I'm not sure I can trace its origins accurately, but I do know that after finishing "The Venetian Vespers" I wanted to do something that would balance it by dramatic contrasts: the sleazy instead of the opulent, America instead of Europe, a woman as central instead of a man. That was one of the aims. Another was to take a character almost entirely unprepossessing, a fat and slovenly drunken woman with garish and vulgar taste, and to try to win the reader's sympathy for her by the time the poem was over. That is to say, if the reader is obliged to reverse his initial sense of repulsion and his emotional bias against her, then the poem would have performed one of the tricks I'd hoped from it. And then, before the poem had taken any shape or outline, I knew I wanted to get down that desolate landscape in November, and contrast it to the stage-set dawn of the *New Yorker* ad.⁷ I'm puzzled that the poem suggested John O'Hara to you, for to me its atmosphere seems more like Nathaniel West. But if indeed it has that mordancy, if it has the overtones of an Ensor painting, then, though it make the skin crawl somewhat, it will have worked as it should.

⁷Examples of the advertisement referred to here and in more detail in the following letter can be found in *The New Yorker*, February 15 (1966), p. 218, and October 15 (1973), p. 168.