

Mark Lamin, from memory
1981?

Skunk Hour (for Elizabeth Bishop)

Robert Lowell

Nautilus Island's hermit/heir
Still lives through winter in her Spartan cottage;
Her sheep still graze above the sea.
Her son's a bishop.
Her farmer is first selectman ↔
- In our village.
She's in her dotage.

Thirsting for the hierarchic privacy
Of Queen Victoria's time century
She buys up all the eyesores
Facing her shore
And lets them fall.

The season's ill.
We've lost our summer millionaire,
Who seemed to spring from an L.L. Bean
Catalogue. His nine-knot yawl
Was auctioned off to lobstermen.
A red fox stain covers Blue Hill.

And now our fairy decorator
Brightens his shop for fall.
His fishnet's filled with orange work,
Orange, his cobbler's bench and awl;
There's no money in his work,
He'd rather marry.

One dark night,
My tudor Ford climbs the hill's skull.
I watch for love-cars, lights turned down,
They lay together, hull to hull,
Where the graveyard shelves on the town. ...
My mind's not right.

A car radio bleats,
"Love, oh careless love..." I hear
My ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,
As if my hand were at its throat. ...
I myself am hell;
~~and~~ nobody's here —

Only skunks, that search in the moonlight
For a bite to eat.

They march on their soles up Main Street:
White stripes, moonstruck-eyes' red fire
Past ^{under} the chalk-dry and spar spire
Of the Trinitarian church.

I stand on the ^{top} steps
Of our back porch ^{steps} and ^{breathe} smell the rich air. —
A mother skunk with her column of bitterns \leftrightarrow
 \leftarrow Swills ~~in~~ the garbage pail.
She jobs her wedge-head in a cup
Of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
And will not scare.