

Epitaphs

What is this death, disorder, that lingers in the head?—
Your house is tidy, and the desk swept clean;
The leaves are raked, the flowers put to bed.

A friend in London died—you sent the wife a cable—
Is there a nagging doubt that you were really friends?
Still, the comity was stretched across the years as far as you were able.

You want to keep his epitaph to the point and short,
But every time you try to summarize his life
The fetus of the ego grows and grows, and you abort.

And so the souciance keeps sitting in the mind—
Someone will try to summarize your life some day, somewhere,
And if the child is born at all, no arms, no legs, or deaf, or blind.

Memories abound, abort—more than you can master—
Someone measured in Madrid, another taped in Rome:
Better settle for the photograph smiling at disaster.

Still, that widow in the London flat needs a word or two—
Death, disorder, in our tidy homes—these children of the picaresque:
You smile and smile at me, I smile at you.

CHARLES EDWARD EATON