

Robert Gibb

Khrushchev Visits Mesta Machine, 1959: A Variation on the Double Sonnet

I.

The mills are down. No floodlit cumulus
Spilling out. No hard freight switched in the yards.
Because of the strike, he'll be ushered up
To Mesta instead. Limos and bodyguards,

Crowds lining the street. It's late September
And the Cold War, stockpiles of coke and steel
Mounded along the river like those he remembers
Growing up in the Ukraine. Still reeling

From the treatment given him so far –
Insults flung from dais and press – he's touched
To have such a turnout, and is hardly
Out of the car when he's greeted in Russian,

That gilt-domed tongue, by an excited janitor
From Minsk. Before long, in their shop-floor

II.

Form of détente, he's happily working
The crowd, introducing a glum Gromyko
When a clerk named Jackey, ignoring
The guards, gives Khrushchev one of his own

Cigars. In return he's handed the wristwatch
Which he raises into the air, silver
Flashing, the clamped band soviet and squat.
That evening in the *Daily Messenger*

We'll see it below his own, there on the wrist
He's held out, laughing, for the photo.
Only two years from the panic of sputnik
There's no way that any of us could know –

One watch for time, the other for history –
How soon it would all be gone, come victory.

Melville Views the Homestead Works

A beached fleet of whale ships! As if
The manufactory had somehow come
To rest, here among the inland hills
And foundry of the rivers, mill fires
Smoky as try-pots rendering their fats.

He's already seen the iron mouths
Of furnaces being stoked, nights before
The mast when they pulled the fire-board
Back, but not a whole armada torched
At once, the open field its brick-kiln.

And not, like this, in endless shifts –
A hoist for a windlass, blow stacks, gouts