

Pollard

You and me and your crosshatches and my doubledays, crossing
the street one afternoon,
 not the main street but its first eastern parallel,
 the one where the pavement has been repaired
 with a red-colored asphalt—
So far as I know, this town has not used this red asphalt
anywhere, save here.

And you and me and your crosshatches and my doubledays, watching
a man cross in the opposite direction,
 one block farther south
 (of course I have purified these cardinals)
 and we are both made aware,
From the way he occupies the street,
 the street with its stitches of red-colored asphalt,
 we are made aware that—

He has led a pollarded life:
His new growth is always being harvested for fuel:
His topmost shoots are converted into foul-smelling cheap smoke:
His older portions remain strong and viable:
His trunk has grown large to support the weight of disallowed branches:
His cultivation is intensive:
His output is vast:
His canopy is carefully circumscribed.

So you and me and your buckleblack and my hamstrings, looking
at those angry, outrageous fists
 where, each year, from truncated cumbersome old growth
 the man forces out raucously erect scouts climbing skyward,
And we stare with some revulsion
 at how tightly they clench back upon themselves
 at the fury of their pointless exertions.

Down near that carelessly repaired asphalt,
the bark is beginning to crack,
and soon he will be a dottard,
and perhaps we will carve out a passageway,
 so better to look at the deadness of the frustrated pith.