

ANTHOLOGY

1

Opening the Norton Anthology
to the first poem, page twenty-three,
I come across Walt Whitman
tut-tutting about what's gone wrong.
I explain double-digit inflation--
I quote from Hart Crane's *Bridge*.
"Nonsense!" sputters Walt. I agree
books should start at page one.

2

We begin. He introduces
modern poetry to the literate masses
who don't understand the confusion
of justifying words.
I tell him that halfway through
(on page seven hundred thirty-five)
Auden left England, disillusioned,
to breathe the American dream,
and on the same annotated page
Auden returned to England.
"What went wrong?" cries Walt.
I explain that Auden believed
poetry makes nothing happen.
"Nonsense!" sputters Walt. I agree
precursors need proof and definition.

3

Does Walt the Prophet despise me
for often lapsing into rhyme and form
when he worked so hard to shatter
rhyme and transmute form?
Can he understand that only craft
remains when passion's gone?
I and other poets ask,
What went wrong with Whitman's dream?
There comes a gruff reply:
"It turned to a box of chocolate candy
that bellyaches on (with annotations)
for over fourteen hundred pages."

4

And fourteen hundred years ago
England was un-Anglicized
while pre-America rolled
in bald eagles and wild swans.
Something must have gone wrong.
Whitman's borrowed by every school.
The eagle's endangered. The swan's
on page one-twenty-six at Coole.
Auden's dead. No one listens
to lady and gentleman poetasters
who clamor that poetry matters.