

## Saints

At an exhibition of Renaissance altarpieces

The saints outnumber me, twenty to one.  
In solemn rows they stand unfazed, aglow  
with carmine robes and lapis cloaks. They know  
too much eternity, things that would stun  
a modern. Is it best that they stay dumb,  
indifferent to my presence? As I go  
my time-bound way, they look with slow  
intent toward a distant place where time is done.

And even so I want to understand  
their complicated signs—the knife and wheel  
of martyrdom—the fine, mysterious hands.

But they, unmoved, reluctant to reveal,  
still stare at heaven with looks of stern command,  
guarding the keys of what to them is real.