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The Philosophy of Robert Zelcowitz

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Ryan Futrell

The Philosophy of Robert Zelcowitz

When Ben and Paul and I
Were at that age when children know
That life is nothing that can be taught
Or merely learned in school,
We met Robert Zelcowitz.

When we spent nights at coffee bars
And wrote our verse on napkins or
In little blue notebooks tucked away
In the pockets of our coats,
We met Robert Zelcowitz.

When we thought that love
Was coming when the weather warmed
Thinking spring meant romance
And winter was for cigarettes,
We met Robert Zelcowitz.

When youth had nearly passed
And Ben and Paul and I knew
That growing old meant dying young
Or dying soon enough,
We met Robert Zelcowitz.

* * *

At twenty-two
The face in the mirror seems less noble
Than my own.
That summer
When Robert Zelcowitz opened up our
Eyes I knew.

And if, on account of our political situation,
There are quite a number of houses
Without roofs,
And men lying about the countryside
(Neither drunk nor asleep),
If it is unwise to say too much in letters,
And if, under the temperatures prevailing
The two sexes are presently the weak
And the strong,

It isn't all that uncommon this time of year,
Not for Robert Zelcowitz.
Flood, Fire and the desecration of the land,
The physical pain and the fiscal grief,
Are all familiar tribulations;
We have seen them all before,
As events which belong to the natural world,
Where the occupation of space
Is the real and final fact
And Time turns round itself.
They return again and again, only to pass
Again and again into their formal opposites.
This is what Robert Zelcowitz was saying,
There is nothing new under the sun.