

54. *Barcelona: Scrawl*

Renunciation is not enough. You must act.
Yet action mustn't dominate you. In the heart of action,
you must remain free from all attachment.

They told me to take a street-car named Desire, . . .
and ride six blocks and get off at—Elysian Fields!

Desire actually started across the street . . .
to hear what Love might have to say.

Q1 You agonize and call me Krishna; walk
three times Las Ramblas and decide to yield
to rouge — or pride in not. You choose. Such talk,
such sin, such vision of the battlefield!

Q2 Then humble when you held me late that night
in my pure yearning bed I now recall
when in us trust and sleep could reunite,
now rounded rest, fields feint in this traced scrawl:

Q3 Like Gaudí's spires, this troth erects your touch
above the ground, though of the ground, the field
of faith. I quivered in your sky-filled clutch
and wondered how it happened you were healed.

C O Fields of Being, O Grounds of Praise,
O Arrows of Desire, make dance each phrase.

*End rime sounds noted
only when involved
in internal sounds.*

Within quatrains self-
contained —

*Assonance examples
Alliteration and
consonance examples*

Q1. *agonize times decide
pride, you rouge choose,
call walk talk, sin vision;
such sin, Ramblas rouge*

Q2. *Pure yearning, held
bed, late feint traced, me
sleep; humble held late
recall sleep field's scrawl,
rounded rest, field's feint,
thus this traced scrawl*

Q3. *Like spires sky, Gaudí'
ground, troth though, touch
above of clutch wondred,
this in quivered filled;
Gaudí' ground, troth touch,
spires erects ground
wondered, field faith,
happened healed*

C. *Fields Being Desire, O
Arrows; Desire dance,
Praise make phrase*

KEY WORD *field*

Σ COUPLET TIE

Q1. *battlefield*

Q2. *fields*

Q3. *field*

The EPIGRAPH is from Peter Brook's production of the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gita* is the famous scripture in which *Krishna* as god advises Arjuna entering the **field of battle**. **E2:** from the Tennessee Williams 1947 play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Act 1. **E3:** from James Baldwin's 1983? "Guilt, Desire, and Love." **Gaudí** designed Sagrada Familia basilica, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in *Barcelona*. Under construction since 1882, the spires were, I found in 1994, terrifying to ascend. Theologian Paul Tillich called God the **ground** of being; see his 1951 *Systematic Theology*, v1, p238. A remote physical analogy is the Higgs **field** which gives mass to electrons, protons, and other particles. **Las Ramblas** is a Barcelona district of temptations where **rouge** cosmetics suggests prostitution. **Feint/faint:** feint means sham; faint means faded, timorous, unfounded, or a swoon. **Sin:** In Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*, Minnie declares *una suprema verità d'amore: fratelli, non v'è al mondo peccatore cui non s'apra una via di redenzione!* — "a supreme truth of love: brothers, there is no sinner in the world to whom a path of redemption does not open!" Psalm 51:7. **Quiver** is a pun. **Arrows of Desire:** from the Preface to William Blake's 1804 *Milton*, often called "Jerusalem," sung as a patriotic hymn written in 1916 by Anglican Hubert Parry. Also think of the arrow in Bernini's *St Teresa*. Σ Q1 Q2 Q3 C *field*.



"Because the lyric is intended to be voiceable by anyone reading it, in its normative form, it deliberately strips away most social specification (age, regional location, sex, class, even race)."
—Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 1997, p2.



Q1. The subject ("you") considers hiring (or being) a prostitute. Yielding to this temptation would be sinful, but taking pride in rejecting the temptation would *also* be sinful. The subject calls the writer "Krishna" for the advice to abandon attachment to *either* outcome of this *double-bind* choice, as sinning is unavoidable.

Q2. Then the writer recalls the subject holding him as they trusted each other enough to sleep together in the same bed. Not indicated is whether this "sleep" was simply companionate or sexual. The "pure yearning" is also ambiguous — yearning for the well-being of the subject? yearning for God? Is "pure yearning" different from the attachment Krishna advises against? If so, how? The writer's recollection is only faintly "traced" in poem itself.

Q3. The "troth," the loyalty pledge often associated with the marriage vow, arising from the fields (Q1) of temptation, and then (Q2) of the bed, now (Q3) points to something transcendent, a ground above the ground, the sky, "the field of faith" — Elysian Fields? The subject's embrace of the writer is a "sky-filled clutch." The phrase "above the ground though of the ground" may suggest the divine in the ordinary. The writer was amazed, "wondered," that the subject, who had been so conflicted in "the battlefield," came to be "healed" — in theology, finding salvation. The word "erects" adds to the ambiguity — does it indicate sexual arousal or is it a metaphor for such mystical experiences as Bernini suggests with the phallic arrow in his statue of St Teresa? Or the erection of Gaudí's towers?

C. The writer addresses the Divine as a classical Muse, and asks that the scrawl of the poem, the result of desire, become a hymn of praise.

**Shake-
spearean
rime
scheme:** **A B A B** **SOME INTERWOVEN THEMES**
● Desire, choice, and *apatheia*

C D C D E F E F G
● Fields, ground (profane, sacred)
● The poem ("scrawl") itself as a poor conveyance of an experience of transcendence
● The **sacred** (Sagrada Familia) and **profane** (Las Ramblas) in Barcelona — or any city? — or the world?