

EMIGRANT SHIP

The Pilgrim Poppa, grilling manly torso,
 Sprawls on the deck in Port-Said-purchased hat;
 Here, by this floating Serpentine (but more so)
 The Pilgrim Momma chides her Pilgrim Brat.

They talk of Wogs and Niggers, trash and treasure
 And bargaining. The urgent wail of sex
 And Tin Pan Alley stirs in strident measure
 The unfulfilment of our lower decks.

They sense no lure in the Arabian magic
 Vast, to the East, across the narrow sea,
 Nor know the Western shore where, bright or tragic,
 There swells a continental pregnancy.

The tales of Sinbad, scimitars and raiders
 And of strong, silent Englishmen—each ghost
 Is lost upon this lido, like the traders
 Who still hawk bodies from the evening coast.

Tonight the dance, the celluloid emotions,
 Bingo and cards and couples in the dark,
 Where burning limbs (smothered in soothing lotions)
 On passion's frail, synthetic tide embark.

I am alone. No destiny indentures
 My foot-loose fortune to the Southern Cross;
 Unlike the true adventurer's adventures
 Mine is some phantom ship or albatross,

Or world of ancient mariners, whose histories
 Still haunt such seas from the abyss of Time,
 And out of Africa the ancient mysteries,
 Old hopes, old fears, the Nemesis of crime.

For here, where once the seas were rent asunder,
 I hear the bondsmen moan and Pharaoh boast
Before those cliffs of water fall in thunder
Upon the chariots of the mighty host.

REGINALD REYNOLDS