

Andrew Saltarelli

The Hall of American Pilgrims

In memory of W.H. Auden

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Erie Street,
The digirati in the shops
Made me feel obsolete.

And down by the dying river
Beside the shining yachts,
I heard a student croon,
'What happened to Camelot?

'Where are the lays of olden days,
Blithe airs by riverbanks?
Where are the odes of yesteryear?
In the vaults of data banks.

'Nostalgia is sentimental,
Forgive my dulcet plaints.
But where's the parish of Eros
And the hymns of the saints?

'So I pluck a purple flower
And wave it in the air,
Hoping that a freeway driver
Might stop his car and stare.'

And all the pundits on the block
Began to laugh and prate,
'Welcome to the New World Order,
Why don't you medicate?

'You're scared that we're inside your head
Tangling your synapses,
You're scared that we'll invade your brain
Like a creeping disease.

'These purple-mountain majesties
And amber-waves of grain,
These grand Canyons and Everglades
Will not assuage your pain.

'Zolof Paxil Luxov Prozac
Why don't you just give in?
Nardi Wellbutrin Asendi
Muffle the fury within.

'We hope you know there's no way out
Our screens are here to stay,
They flicker on this darkling plain
Twenty four hours a day.

'We babble on a billion channels,
We fight and grin and snort,
The airwaves are our sceptred isles,
Your mind where we hold court.

'The U.S.A. is A-okay,
It's only you who's blue,
Look at all those broken people
We've eagerly reglued.

'The bandwagon is leaving, pal.
So don't get left behind,
A sad sack caressing a flask
Lonely for humankind.'

It was late, late in the evening,
The sky prepared to storm,
The pundits applied their make-up
And began to misinform.

It was deep, deep in the river
Where the poisoned fish swam,
On swaying grass the student danced
To the thunder's frenzied dithyrambs.