1960

American Gothic

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I saw it hanging there on the wall
And I grimaced
And convoluted like a pricked balloon
My stomach shrank
His indiscriminate pitchfork
Taunted man
Spat on woman

He looked right down along the
Length of his nose
At the world
Before my eyes his wife vanished;
He didn't notice.
Maybe she had been assimilated
Into his veins and flowed there
Hating.

I went home, went to bed
And dreamed I could see
Him, frowning at Christ
Hanging on the other wall for
Giving a bad impression.
There he was, slashing away
At Caesar's back to
Punish his adulteries.
And no sooner had that sacred libation
Nourished our earth than
He was up on the funeral pyre
Pouring vengeance into the
Lent, bent Roman ears.

In our time, he was burning
Books and films, instead of witches.
He had parents believing
Orphan Annie twice the sinner that
Joan of Arc was.
And he was rowing his boat
Through atom bomb tests, and writing
“Letters to the Editor” and
He was dead set on stamping out
Every sin and sinner in the world.
And I wondered when the sinners
Would gang up on him
And bring our own
Corrupt, compatible, comfortable
Peace back to earth.