

(I)

Forty-two stone steps, four landings, turnings,
Climbing, dodge the cleaner with his mop.
Walls here, bear blank witness to old yearnings,
Old turns whose ups and downs aimed for the top.
The landing's walls around our doors are peeling,
Shedding painted years clean off the bricks:
Built in memory perhaps concealing
Vanished conjurers passing with their tricks?
But only chanteurs' sentimental song
Expects the magic spells to linger here
The mirrors in these rooms have all along
Been blind to painted face and atmosphere.
What protean creatures crammed into these spaces,
Prepared and waited, rested, left no traces?

(II)

Here a clown once leant his unicycle
There, acrobats would limber up in tights
A thespian sipped brandy pre-recital.
'Just for the voice y'know.' How many nights?
Thirty thousand? How many dancers' stretches
Strong slim waists; how many scales cascaded
How many new gags writ for ancient sketches?
What odours, scents, ambitions have pervaded
What comic swore he'd strangulate his feed?
Before us, they these same cold steps descended
To the limelight: follow where they lead –
Our mentors, on their mysteries we've depended.
Their cheers and laughter long to silence dwindled.
That elemental joy we have rekindled.