On the Lawn at the Villa

By Louis Simpson

On the lawn at the villa—
    That’s the way to start, eh, reader?
We know where we stand—somewhere expensive—
    You and I *imperturbés*, as Walt would say,
Before the diversions of wealth, you and I *engagés*.

On the lawn at the villa
    Sat a manufacturer of explosives,
His wife from Paris,
    And a young man named Bruno,

And myself, being American,
    Willing to talk to these malefactors,
The manufacturer of explosives, and so on,
    But somehow superior. By that I mean democratic.
It’s complicated, being an American,
    Having the money and the bad conscience, both at the same time.
Perhaps, after all, this is not the right subject for a poem.

We were all sitting there paralyzed
    In the hot Tuscan afternoon,
And the bodies of the machine-gun crew were draped over the balcony.
    So we sat there all afternoon.


Source: Collected Poems (BOA Editions Ltd., 1988)