

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 *imperturbes*, 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.

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Born in Jamaica, Louis Simpson spent most of his adult life in the United States, where he was active as a poet, translator, literary critic, and professor. After serving with an airborne division in WWII, he completed his education at Columbia and in France, where his first book of poetry was published in 1949. Typical subjects included his West Indian boyhood and the mysteries of ordinary life. *At the End of the Open Road* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1964.

