

CLOSING TIME IN THE PRIMITIVE ROOMS

FREDERICK EBRIGHT

Abruptly the afternoon light in the museum fades
and I am alone in this corridor
among the shields and assagais and drums,
witchdoctors' masks and warriors' canoes,
and I am suddenly afraid
in this fusty ethnological museum smell
of long-dead things, dried matting, disinfectant
and implacable old evil.

Mostly I am afraid of the waiting silence,
miasma of accumulated time, arrested life,

echoes of violence in far places . . .
an impalpable aura of hostility:
the savage teeth, the blubberlips, slit sockets of sunk eyes,
the hush of drumheads waiting, waiting,
sacrificial fires abiding,
old aboriginal black hatred
in tongues that I shall never know;
the long-stilled voices and dry grasses and formaldehyde,
a camphor smell of death.

Small talisman, the legends typed in I.B.M. . . .