

The Carbuncle

The swimmer, not yet tanned, somewhat turned toward age,
With the pustulating carbuncle on his arm,
Would seem well this side of any charm,
Leprous, illuminated to himself, upon a medieval page.

Must we in middle age turn cruel
To ourselves, to others, when the pin
Point swells beneath unblemished skin,
A sore that has a name in common with a jewel?

So much is concentrating now, so much is done—
We have been lavish, even lewd,
Done everything that you can do as nude,
And now must wear this garish oval in the sun.

The brilliant skin will never be the same—
Some might even see the bosses of the chest,
Ambiguous these days, not altogether blest:
Thank God, we share, in part, the jewel-name.

So we must learn to lance these garnets
As if we ran a rapid jeweller's concern,
Taking in the spunk and spoils of every stress in turn—
We lose some flaws perhaps, knowing how to cut the stone just before it sets.

—Charles Edward Eaton