

Derelicts

Along the wharves, sooty shapes in relief
against the glowing dun of a flat sky,
they seem not men but stations on a way:
numbered poses of ruin, statues, immobile
except when new cracks open in face or arm.
Imagination finds its corpse in them,
images of the various ends of those
who fail the welcome—ordeal or kiss—of earth.

Emblems, not men—and yet to one who waits,
resolutely still, and watches, it seems they live,
they move, reluctant, with an inhuman stealth.
Always where light and darkness overlap
they are edging imperceptibly toward the dark:
at dusk creeping forward into night,
at dawn drifting backward into night.

They live—as though compelled but still resisting,
posing as eternal symbols of ruin
to be forgiven movement and left alone.
But they advance, bitterly, the distance now
remaining from themselves to the true emblem,
the statue worn to nothing, motionless,
invisible, the image of what waits,
to which the greatest human stillness is quick.

— *Albert F. Moritz*