

The New Disease

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It was before we understood
Why the weight loss
And the brittle cough
Or knew immune deficiency
Could rise from anthropoid strains
Or had any evidence at all
About transmission
But they sent the medical student
Into that anxious room
Not knowing
Anyway

And I sat at the young man's bedside
Wrapped in a yellow paper gown
Just to practice taking a history
As a nameless new disease
Made its own history
My muffled questions
Barely understood
Through mask and shield
His whispered answers
A fragmentary list of ills
Incomprehensible
To us both