

Charles Hughes**The Artist**

On Main Street — west, two blocks from the river, Third
 And Main — there stood the town's small library,
 A trim white clapboard house built on a hill,
 Its bookshelves puzzle-pieced into two floors
 Of little rooms and narrow hallways, its
 One reading room a screened-in porch the breeze,
 Some summer days, made a near paradise.
 A man of maybe seventy most people
 Didn't know well — they knew him as *the artist*
 ("The artist loves the porch" or "has gone home") —
 He hadn't lived in town for very long
 And didn't socialize — a few did know
 He had been married plus the fact he'd been
 Drafted into the First World War and shipped
 To France (a woman, a librarian,
 Of roughly his own age, had drawn him out);
 The artist used to sit and paint the view,
 The hues of greens of leaves concealing branches
 And trunks of trees, whose roots gripped and were gripped by
 The also living earth far down below.
 Children sometimes would wander in and ask
 What he was painting. "Light," he always said,
 "I paint the light" — which wasn't strictly true.
 But what else could he say? Not his belief —
 Sprung from the horrors he'd been witness to —
 That all is an illusion or at least
 Is passing, as the Bible says, away,
 Though infinitely, infinitely more
 Slowly than shadows yield to a new day.
 The breeze washed through the screens. The artist painted
 Yellows and blues revealed in sunlit greens.
 This was his work — failed work, or so he judged it —
 To try to catch the light he couldn't see.