

## Couch

When my analytic couch arrived, Ariel helped me cajole it out of its embarrassing brown box, a humiliating abode for such a sophisticated sofa. I'd chosen baby-blue for my leather bound divan, a hopeful color I coordinated with my turquoise and pink faugh Native American throw rug, so unlike the dark Oriental rugs and anal-brown couches preferred by the poohbahs of the New York psychoanalytic scene—analysts who sit stiff in their chairs wide-eyed and bewildered as they wait for a catharsis, a cathexis, or a bowel movement, the difference being a matter of interpretation. (My money's on metonymy, what about you?)

Ari and I couldn't find the legs that went with my couch. We looked everywhere. Finally, Ari found some cinder blocks. We jacked-up the sacred vehicle of Freud's recumbent invention on the remnants of collegiate bricks and boards! Will I ever escape my past? A thought lodged somewhere between *odd as hell* and *hypocritical* in the civilization of my discontent.

## Remembering Vietnam, Memorial Day, 2017

*“To all those who have established and are maintaining the right to refuse to kill. Their foresight and courage give us hope.”  
Monument to Conscientious Objectors, Tavistock Square, London, England*

Some went because they believed in their bones and blood, without filigree, that they were defending our freedom.

Others were too unimaginative to do anything else—metabolized propaganda with an M16—like cattle to the slaughterhouse they followed their leaders.

Some served because their lives were disappearing down the swirling commodes of the universe, or because they were terrified not to serve. What would their families think if they didn't go? What would God do to them?

There were those who knew they'd excel at killing people and couldn't do that legally anywhere else. Ian and Gerry, brothers I played baseball with, competed for how many ears they could collect.

Some didn't go. I didn't go. I served as a Conscientious Objector, lucky to know that I couldn't live with myself if I killed another human being.

We C.O.s deserve to be remembered today.  
We served our country, not our government.  
We tried to make the world a better place  
and, like all the others, we failed.

## **Toots and Fred**

Viola was her name  
but we called her Toots.  
She was bent at the waist,  
her back slightly humped,  
and in her Minnie Mouse  
voice she often told us,  
“I’m counting the days  
‘till you arrive.” Toots was  
our destination when we drove  
to our place on Walloon Lake  
along with her husband Fred  
whose big farmer hand always  
found the middle of my back  
and who would answer when  
we asked after his health,  
“If I was any better, I’d have  
to be twins and the world  
couldn’t handle two of me.”  
Fred and Toots were married  
for sixty-two years. He joked  
that he’d hate to have  
to gamble on another one  
while Toots keened that,  
had she to do it over again,  
she would never marry.

A few years back, I leaned  
over her sickbed to kiss  
her dying brow. “I love you,  
Toots,” I said, “and Fred  
loves you too.” At that  
she closed her eyes  
and, with what little  
strength she had left,  
shook her head.

## **Bombs Noise Torture**

Old Bud walkin' his dogwood tree  
in a wheelbarrow a leash  
wrapped around its bark  
he pushes the wheelbarrow  
through our neighborhood  
too many years in Japanese POW camps  
he went to the war at eighteen  
came back when he was twelve  
wears faded Converse sneakers  
holey Pittsburgh Pirate t-shirts  
wrinkled jeans cuffs rolled up  
a sun-faded Texaco cap  
backwards on his dome  
lives with his mom  
walks unannounced  
into the O'Hanan's house  
maybe he thinks  
with fifteen kids  
they won't notice him  
or that he might become  
one of them  
start over again  
but half-dressed adolescent girls  
don't appreciate the intrusions  
Mr. O'Hanan has to talk to him  
we love you Bud he says  
make sure to knock  
don't touch my kids

## At the Russian Restaurant and Disco in Pittsburgh

Brute disco pounds, pulses,  
daffy silver ball turns, sparkles,  
boobs bounce and blunder,  
sequined dresses chrysalis  
bulbous bodies. Bald  
heads, tight pants,  
spavined bellies over belts  
like bags of fresh-catch  
spew over gunnels  
of the over-the-hill.  
Channel No.5 fumes, lipstick  
fumes, vodka, and cigarette  
fumes, skunk through the hall.

What a good time!

The sparkling ball turns  
like the only unhatched  
egg laid by a citizen  
from a disgruntled galaxy  
filled with fetid spores  
that, once hatched,  
turn everyone into narcissists  
whose mission on earth is  
to get laid. One leers  
at a woman who winces  
from the gleam of his gold  
necklace and Rolex.  
She thought he hadn't heard a word  
she'd said, but when he asks,  
"Just how Catholic are you?" She  
realizes he's been listening.