

TWO FIGURES AT THEIR VERSE

“Towering” poets in another light:

Yearning for Celtic kingdoms set in stone,
Dreaming of blood-dimmed tides and gilded birds,
One foundered in the heart-shop's rag and bone.

The other sledged rock to the Carmel height,
Raising a stone house that was all his own—
The perch from which he'd measure out a span
Of hawk wings gyring at inhuman height.

He said that he would rather kill a man
Than kill a hawk. And it was not just talk.
(He longed to hear the death of human words—
That is, of humankind—and hoped a vulture
Would ingest his corpse, so he could fly,
Set free at last from all he cursed as culture.)

The Irish senator saw nothing wrong
With marching, blue-shirt men in matching kit
(He wrote the words of menace to their song).
The Irish airman that he sent to die,
Beyond all love and hate, did not care why.

The one who longed to put an end to it—
To every bit of what his kind had done—
And melt his atoms in the Carmel sun,
Lived long enough to watch the suburbs bloom
Below his perfect *tor*. In deathless hate,
He cursed them with his human breath—his fate
The fate of those who were like him, his doom
Their own.

So pilot, raptor, falcon, hawk,
All towering figures by their flight from earth—
The house of those they thought of little worth—
Perfected, by the poems they would write,
Their final selves, read in their truest state.
And as their monument of unmoved will,
The tower and the stones are standing still.

VERY LIKE

Slipped off from its downy mother ship,
The tri-corn cloudlet has been set adrift
To wander—only barely—in the shape
Of sacred-to-the-goddess Sicily.

It is an isle set in a blue sky-sea—
Fleece-grey; soft-piled; three-sided; wooly-cliffed.
Just cut off by a skinny turquoise strip
From cumulogenitus Italy,
It sidles up to set its acro-cape
Against a vaporous Calabrian toe.

I watch the waters from above below
The firmament that courses through the straits
Messina's made, until the breezes blow
Venus's island all to broken bits.
So dies the figure that no longer fits.
The ocean of the day now sits and waits
To float a fresh new archipelago.

VET

1

Sometimes, nothing's left but fear,
when all the girls in summer dresses,
 from The Last Good War,
 don't help much anymore;

when the autumn of that year
of '45 no longer impresses
 the boy from PA's mountains;
 when all the Paris fountains

cannot slake the final thirst
that harbingers one last, parched dread—
 that Hell will be his inn
 because some unshrove sin

has left his peasant soul accursed.
Boy-acolyte, he'll soon be dead
 At 90, every priest
 His grandson's age, at least.

2

What will they sing you at your Mass,
our father? Since they do not know

your '20s soul—they can't—
there's no Gregorian chant;

their rite will not be right. You'll pass
away the way new Catholics go.

Ex top kick, done with all of that,
You'll be at last just one more stat.

I know you were afraid, and I
am sorry I was helpless there,
at the facility you slept
in, where so many grunts were kept

who lolled like bobble-heads. To die
so soon, from having left that chair
we'd wheeled you in The ribboned tears
keep falling down through all the years.

WAKING STATE

Why not, he thought; she'd done it once before.
But why no ring-tone, chirp, or beep? (The bell
Had come straight out of 1982.)
Another blast of need? Or fear? Once more,
A call to come, as in the past. But why
Such terror in the claim her name was Gail?
(The plaintive ear piece keened insistently.)
Clearly, her name had always been Marie,
But this was not that name. Tones wailed with want,
Crazed want. Why did she say "I'd die for you"?
And why pretend she lived in Maine? Why lie?
Marie had made it clear that she and Bill
Were living in a state they called Vermont,
The place she'd always called him from—*Vermont*.
