

## ***Elegy For Hotshots***

*and the firesmoke of mankind everywhere...St. John Perse*

Heatstroke. Shock & peril. Wildland wildfires burn  
another season: Nevada, Alaska, California, Arizona;  
after New Mexico, The Granite Mountain  
Hot Shots climb in to make a firebreak,  
to save their own town.

Each burn is wind-whipped power  
& terror; each fire creates its own weather.  
The Lookout saw the monsoon pattern winds reverse.  
He called out a warning; the lookout got out--  
down a bulldozed trench.

Not his teammates.  
They get caught in a basin,  
a firebowl,  
burn in their aluminum emergency  
shelter wraps--breathless  
in the blazing burnover.  
Firepower & terror.

Firebreak lost to heart ache.  
Other firefighters snuff out  
each hot spot.

Chaparral thickets equal fuel, lit tinder.  
Thunderheads release rain. No rain  
reaches dry earth, hushed up  
by dry air.  
All the mountain is hushed.  
Nineteen Hotshots hushed,  
snuffed out in flames.

Comes the inferno, sounds like a train.  
Surprises trees--unseen  
surprise is a speedy disease--  
all sound and fury, only ashen  
moon-face, barren, scar, last remains  
forest boles, brush & bone.

The air is charged, electricity fires  
lightning. Storm reverses.  
Safety zone smokes. Fire-eaters lost.

The Hot Shots of Yarnell  
go out in a fierce fuel.

Sparks leap firebreaks,  
    fire erratic--  
burrows underground  
quick  
    as a lit wick,  
    races up roots,  
outburst,  
    blowback,  
black pillars plume;  
scorch spreads, cooks updrafts,  
sucks up all the air.

A black caravan passes  
    in ashes.  
    Flame-out.  
Pain is a fireline.  
Ashes are remains.

### ***The Burning Bush On 4 July***

We are drivers on speed, on a planet of fireworks.  
Eventually our starship will sink in the black hole  
of burnt-out stars, a volcano in the ring of fire.  
We are warned by a Biblical passage

featuring a burning bush. I can see it--  
here on the high ground half way between  
Charleston & Atlanta, near the River Westobou.  
On the 4th of July, the sycamore tree appears

like a burning bush. Leaves ready to leave,  
like Autumn on fire in Vermont, yellow on the fly,  
flamed, dry heat, like the Sinai. Be still. Keep moving.

This is no game of Clue--with a secret passage  
from the library in the mansion to the garden;  
more like the attic-closet-fruit cellar hide-out,  
a way out--leading to the river, a rest-stop with quilts  
on the Underground Railroad. Tubman with her pistol.  
Follow the visions in Jacob Lawrence's paintings:

*Harriet And The Promised Land* (no. 17)--wagon rolls,  
"The Last Journey." Maybe they will make Chicago.  
Migration. Some of us will not make it through the day.  
U. S. Marines are bleeding Red, White & Blue  
for Pashtuns & Baluchs. The Taliban hide in poppies.

Some of us hide behind sand bag walls,  
sleepless in mud huts, in starlight, listening  
to rock slides; feel tremors; mountains grow.  
The Anasazi staked out the Chaco Meridian;

they tracked shadows and sun,  
did not live in their roomy maze; they entered doors  
in mud walls for ceremonies. They knew they were passing  
through on a longitude; light shadows moon phases.

## ***Helicopters Came***

Back in the Mekong Delta, '65:  
I am airborne in a helicopter  
looking down on Vietnamese Rangers;  
battalion attacks Viet Cong, rice paddy.

I fly safe--above the ground-fire; my squadron  
skip-bombs napalm tanks, sticky jelly flames,  
blue and yellow burns. Flashback: Jungle bleeds.  
Commander speaks French, Vietnamese.

I hear the Forward Air Controller clear  
Super Sabres, "huns," in flights of four;  
my squadron's call signs reply. Soldiers die.  
I feel no pain, land safe in swamp and bamboo.

Today, another helicopter: painting is a blur,  
an Iraqi's art on a book cover.  
A veteran's poems on pages, inside, hover:  
PTSD. VA Hospital. Wounded Warrior.

Our world is shaky. Agamemnon dies  
over and over--Trojan Wars. Black clouds.  
IEDs are now the enemy, not punji  
stakes, new booby traps. Poppy.  
Different terrain. Same noise.

I feel the blades beat sand and palm trees.  
I watch Predator crews in California  
control camera's eye as missile kills.  
In safety, I remember. Same shudders.

## ***Adonis & The Boar***

A giant white pig mothers history  
in Homer's poetry, signifies where Aeneas'  
people start a white city, not Rome.

Greeks prove their manhood facing boars.  
A Roman marble sarcophagus  
portrays the Calydonian boar hunt.

Adonis, beloved by Venus, dies,  
gored by a boar in his thigh. Flowers  
bloom from blood drops in paintings--

Rubens & Titian; the myth in Ovid's  
*Metamorphoses* lives as a Roman frieze.  
Jamie Wyeth paints a white pig's portrait.

Today a chef roams the Mediterranean,  
no reservations, eats roast pork  
where the gods set a boar among men.

Sailors in the Odyssey turn  
into swine on Circe's island.  
After war in Troy, Greeks spear wild boar.

Near Waco, on barbed wire fence post & tree,  
signs advertise: Pig Traps. Feral pigs root  
up crops, mud-wallow, trample soil.

A retired Texas Ranger hunts wild boar;  
his dogs track in leather armor; 4-wheel drive,  
son on horseback, daughter packs six-gun,

hunting knife--to rid farm & ranch of marauders,  
pigs feet, trotters. She hog-ties her quarry  
for commissions, captures wild sows on TV.

Pig skin games are big in Texas. Venus sees  
a bomb-wounded soldier; a pig bladder graft  
grows new skin cells & muscle in his thigh;

mutilation, but no amputation. Venus saves  
Adonis, this time--to climb a mountain  
on a bike; warrior-survivor-lover, another *Iliad*.

## ***Sculptor Of Verbs***

*(after the Sculptures of Richard Serra)*

Artist son of Spanish shipyard worker--Bay Area  
boy known now as a man of steel--made a big splash  
tossing ladles of molten lead against warehouse wall.  
His sculptures are VERBS--*to twist, to bend, to roll--*

massive steel sheets rolled 2 inches thick--heavier than airplanes.  
He studied Melville, then left the words on paper for fire--  
folding fire-forged materials. Imagine a dancer in motion--without  
thought of after-image--*just see where her dancing body goes..*

So with steel plates 16 feet high: No notion of metaphor.  
Walk into spaces & out as in a Zen garden or temple & through....  
Later, larger works allow psychological reaction to choreography:  
the body responds to SPIRALS & SEQUENCE as spaces reveal.

Visitors move into & around “torqued ellipses” without knowing where steel  
curves lead--through mineral feel of nature--rusty orange stains.  
Steel responds to rain. View industrial walls; steel sheets are canyons:  
velvety browns, crevasses, rusty rivulets in ravines--all *terrifying*

*sublime, say* mountain climbers. Plot twists. Scary spaces. Fear--  
mixing with awe roves in & out of labyrinthian art--leads to pleasure.  
German foundry riggers set it in an urban plaza, no walls--heavyweights,  
shipbuilders’ rolled plates, balanced as bar-bells, to the millimeter.