

Man of the Crowd

You, who have passed me on the street,
Who have turned away, look for me now;
I am the anonymous bomb in the crowd,

The hurt, the hate you will not feel,
Whose silent fuse has been burning
Down the years.

You think you are innocent and
You will pay
For it.

I have the truth inside me;
It shall be revealed
In a cloud of fire,

My blown -up face on your screen.
In grief you will try to understand
Who I am, what I mean,

What you've done.

Dead Ringer

We could blame potassium and nitrate
for their fatal attraction,
sulfur for being what it is.

We could blame the trees, though they were innocent
before they were burned and ground
to a fine black powder.

While the lead
the brass
the steel

were admittedly more purposeful;
as were the magazine,
triggerhousing,

the long cool barrel with its sight.
After all, they sent the bulletmaker's son to college,
bought a house for the gunsmith's wife.

And what of the hands that assembled and boxed,
the truckers making their rounds?
Did they consider you?

The clerk, the owner of the shop?
You barely
interrupted their sleep.

But the one who leaned across the counter,
tried the grip and the hammer, shoved in the clip,
he thought hard about you,
might even have imagined your surprised expression.

Some of us went to your funeral,
Some of us gambled and went out for drinks on the town,
Some of us went stalking for a fix.

The rest of us stayed home afraid,
and swore,
we had nothing to do with it.

Dead Ringer cont'd

We equivocate, debate, look at it long
term, shake our heads, say
we can't stand, can't take, cannot bear it

While each morning you rise out of blasted kitchens, out of bedrooms, playgrounds,
parked cars, out of the shattering glass, the bloody newspapers strewn out
everywhere

Dead again and again and again

Aerial Photograph*

Looking down, we can see the fields are empty.
Far off a house burns.
A rag of smoke unravels low, over the ground,

and into the valley,
where too late for the harvest,
some trees are ripe with abandoned apples.

In the wide silence after the bombs,
a road runs by a barn at the edge of a lake,
where the blackened spine of a bridge steams in the water.

If we isolate one corner of the shot,
a boat drifts, uncertain, in a gust of wind.
zoom in there, blow it up,

and a man lies in the bottom.
We do not know him,
except that he is an enemy

we did not yet kill.
We are high up,
far away, absorbed in the drone of the plane's engines,

while beyond us, his slightly open mouth, his widened eyes
are transformed to a signal, a series of waves,
a face bombarding a screen,

multiplied, scattered into living rooms,
projected out
into someone's future.

Maybe on a planet clinging to its fading sun,
under a strange sky, somewhere in a city we cannot imagine,
he will shimmer for a moment on a wall—

postscript, artifact of our age—
an ice man,
the fear frozen on his face.

Aerial Photograph

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We might wonder how they would judge us,
how they themselves
would be judged,

the boat riding the waves past them
away from its beginnings,
become light itself,

waves broadcast,
scattered
nothing but waves.

**Note: Once something is broadcast and turned into an electronic signal, such as the photograph which is broadcast in the poem, the waves travel out into space forever.*

Dirge

Let it begin again with the bright flags of leaves,
with them in their new uniforms.

Let it again be the last day of goodbye
Before the war came home, before
We sent them over the sea
To all the flaming towns.

Let us call out to death.
Let us pray for the blood of those
We have come to hate,

And let them in their turn, pray
For the destruction of those we love,
To whom we have said good bye.

Let the generals say the war goes well
In all the fallen towns. And let the names
written in the hollows of the dark,
Fill up with rain.

But let the war go on,
The city of our hopes surrounded.
Let all the walls come down
After so long, so terrible a siege.

And we shall build memorials,
The land rich again, the sons,
The fine daughters grown
Into the full perfection of their youth.

They shall have their war.
We shall grow old and wise,
Our dreams full of the dead returning, forever
Restless in our sleep.

Let all the sons, the fine daughters
Grow full then into the mask of grief.
Let them become all
Fit subjects for a dirge.

The Great Fire

The terrified flame-lit faces were beautiful.
Beautiful too was the burning city,
And the graceful arch of the bridge

Mirrored in the water. Was there beauty
In the plumes of sparks, the collapsing walls and ceilings,
In the closeted shrieks of the twins as they huddled in the dark?

Was there truth in the story of the man in the black coat
Who caught fire and dove into his own reflection, never
To be seen again?

In the pledge of the lovers as they flew off
From the twenty-third floor, or in the blurred features
Of the survivors,

In the scars that melded their bodies,
And in the years that followed, their panic
At the smell of smoke?

They sifted the ashes, compiled vital
Statistics, numbered all the names.
No one was sure how it started.

Still, they built monuments,
Laid out new boulevards,
Elms grew tall on the greens.

And later came picnics, parades,
Novels and plays, hymns of praise to the city
Reborn. *The Great Fire*, they called it.

Some even said that the whole disaster
If viewed from a sufficient distance

looked very like a star.

