

Bruce Guernsey

Radio Days

My father ate his breakfast standing up,
cupping a bowl of cereal in his hand,
at attention by the kitchen counter
where the radio crackled with news from Korea.
We had no television then, few families did
south of Boston in '52,
so what we knew came through the Emerson
with its vibrating wooden case and rotary dial
for the shortwave band, fading
in and out from overseas.
At night, I'd cart the old crate
up to my bedroom for the Red Sox-
Yankees game, closing my eyes
to better imagine each play
through the gunfire of static,
waking hours later to dead air.
"Who won?" I'd ask my Dad in the morning
as he stood by the radio
with his eyes closed, too,
but to a different kind of field.

Six years home from the war
he never said a word about it,
even the day the letter came
asking him to volunteer
the way Ted Williams did.
"I can't," was all he said,
and that night after the game
I climbed the empty stairs to the attic
where the secret box with his Army gear
hummed in my dream like a distant station.
I order you to turn it off—"I can't,"
and into the radio's halo of light,
suddenly swinging a splintered bat,
my father stabbed and stabbed and stabbed,
fans everywhere yelling, blood-wet and spilling

out of the wound onto a field
littered with helmets and paper.
I lay awake for hours after,
and in the morning, dutifully carried
the magic crystal down, and for my father
adjusted the dial, finding the picture.

Naming the Trees

At the National Cemetery in Gettysburg
 all the trees have names,
 both family and genus
 on small brass plaques at the base of each
 to let the visitor know
 the kind of oak,
 whether red, white, or black,
 and is this rock or silver maple
 looking once like any other
 burlapped ball of roots
 when it was lowered to earth
 those decades after the war.

Colorful names like Tulip Poplar,
 Weeping Beech, Buckeye,
 sweet Gum and Ginkgo—
 sounding like nicknames almost, these trees
 from every region and state
 with broad leaves or skinny,
 shiny, dull, or no leaves at all
 like the Eastern Hemlock,
 but all, all with names everyone,
 no matter the size and shape
 amidst the many anonymous
 mute stones in their shade.

Bruce Guernsey is Distinguished Professor of English at Eastern Illinois University. His poems have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, and many of the quarterlies. Among his collections of poetry is *January Thaw* from the University of Pittsburgh Press.