

John Gery

To a Friend Dying of Cancer in a War Zone

Fatigue—a word in English meaning more than *tired* or *exhausted*. Last summer your impassioned heart, Drago, your energy, unsettled me like sudden electricity, a jolt of love ten times the strength of men. Tonight I'm searching for that love again.

29 March 1999

Spring Offensive

So little cause for carolings....

—*Thomas Hardy*

The birds keep singing in the dark
as undeterred as Englishmen
in Africa; my neighbors quiet—
sound asleep—I lie here stark
and fast, near the millennium,

bewildered and as unconsoled
by all the things I thought I knew
as empires by their allies. Still,
this music fills my room, unspoiled
as though it were the one thing true
my country hasn't tried to kill

or bind into its vast regime.
If I, too, could only sing, instead
of tossing dumbly through the night—
anxious to exorcize this dream
and rest in peace in my own bed—
I might not dread the morning light,

dread finding out what new assault
was launched in darkness from the sky
against whomever's next in line
to be disposed of. So who's at fault,
then, these exalting birds, or I?
Cowering in my own design

of arrogance, hung on the air,
I'm stuck, the victim of their song
(whether propaganda or prayer)
insisting nothing can go wrong,
and nothing I do can defy it.

“Paramilitary”

Is it like a faked orgasm,
adopting the same rigor,
the same artificial ecstasy

of that kind of power,
with its “clearly defined
objective”—rushing

alongside the rest of us, we
who plod on, night after
night, week in, week

out, wedding ourselves to
a state we call, for lack
of anything better, “identity”—

a private, separate force
that says, *I know what I need.*
And I want nobody else

*telling me when to put
forward, what rules to play by.
From an instinct no one*

*learns at school, how easily
I come to claim my prize,
pushing around whomever*

*I please. And who dares not
believe I'm real? For the sheer
hell of it, I sound out the part*

*more than the part itself, a
flash of a fantasy, a limit
others can only aspire to, lying*

*to prove there's nothing
to mastering this or any art
but to sweat it out on your own.*

The Secret of Stealth

for Adam Puslojic

What I don't understand somehow
 about the obscene pun on "Big Mac"
 we saw scribbled across the U.S.
 Embassy wall in Belgrade—*Vi imate*
mek, a mi tvrd—something to do with
 the flaccid penis Serbs think of as
 America, applies, too, to those bombers
 tooling invisibly through an empty sky,
 those black hawks we praise as heroic
 in their removal. It's like the guy
 who charms the pants off the ladies
 but never pulls his own zipper down:
 Who are we fooling by sending them?

We are not at war with a faceless enemy
 down there, hacking children apart
 cool as you please, caught red-handed
 in our blue sights, digitally targeted,
 but with ourselves, too moot to die
 readily anymore for anything
 or anyone. Imagine the tiny cell
 we want to impregnate everyone
 everywhere with. Imagine getting
 trapped there ourselves, tucked snugly
 inside, as though locked in the cargo bay
 on a slave ship. Imagine hard love (*tvrd!*)
 within that tight berth. It's no wonder

our bombardiers can't wait to get home.
 Traveling concealed, even in the dark,
 has its liabilities. But to be hidden
 in America is to be stolid and manly
 as apple pie, the one jammed in the pantry
 between the beets and lard. No weapon
 in your hands, or cradled on your lap,
 is ever quite so big as when, unseen
 on its rack, untouched beneath your stiff,
 shiny belly, it promises to spread its duster
 of appleseeds, driven like pure snow
 onto those flailing below, the same ones
 otherwise sure to ruin your best laid plans.

Summit Summary

Tactfully irrelevant as the strategic plan tucked in the vest pocket of the colonel, third from left, beside the female translator in this wire photo of the president's parlor equipped with Queen Anne couches and tables during his meeting with foreign ministers newly arrived from the north and west by special convoy, under the protection of arms, to discuss the latest peace proposal both sides with the predictability of a boomerang will later reject, I continue my work here as, if not Melville's sub-sub-librarian overflowing with scholarly ambition but utterly forgotten behind his moldy stacks, a poet a little less academic than an argument on the relative market value in autumn of the butterwort between two carpenters assessing the property of a modest house whose blueprint has yet to be drawn up on a tract near the town center next to the bank about to implode under pressure from the mistargeted bomb now en route aboard the previously programmed missile launched, as it turns out, just before these same well-dressed dignitaries in this photo completed their lunch of beefsteak and peppers.

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John Gery has two new books forthcoming, *Davenport's Version* (Portals Press, 2002), a narrative poem set in Civil War New Orleans, and *A Gallery of Ghosts* (Story Line, 2003), a collection of poems. The recipient of a 2002 Artist Fellowship from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, he is Research Professor of English at the University of New Orleans and Director of the Ezra Pound Center for Literature, Brunnenburg Castle, Italy.