

Jason W. Selby

Commandment

Through elephant grass young men go
carrying rifles and shotguns at rest.
I listened while invisible
soldiers slipped below torrential wind.
My heart pounded with primitive fear,
surrounded in the jungle,
facing the furious chaos inflicted
by an NVA battalion at dusk.
Men around me were torn open by gunfire;
a mortar hit my buddy
and tore him in two.
My company was almost overrun,
as I discharged and pumped a shotgun,
short of white phosphorus and high explosives.
Later the same night
seven wounded upon the rescue chopper
were plucked by the basket to a burning grave;
the chopper was shot down.
Men, in spinning metal lit like a Christmas tree,
screamed until the night calmed them.
I could do nothing but listen and watch.
Then the NVA poured it on the rest of my men
illuminated in this strange light.
By dawn the Air Force dropped napalm on the bastards.
With my own hands I wrapped bodies and burnt remains

in ponchos for lack of body bags.

Without sympathy,
giving none any more chances,
now I motherfucking kill anything that moves or breathes.
So don't question the collection of ears
or the Viet Cong bodies beneath the ace of spades,
because war is the devil's song.

Returning home and through the years,
and even now when the wind blows that way,
I forget this is only another day's dusk.
Don't question why I won't let you touch me.

JASON W. SELBY is a graduate student in creative writing at the University of Northern Iowa. His work has appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly* and *Lyrical Iowa*. His father, Wesley, served in Vietnam, and "Commandment" is based on his father's combat experience during the night of October 28-29, 1966.