

Conversion

Hugging the dark of that Camden park with Angela
Bonfiore, her necklaced crucifix,
a talisman to repel the Jewboy's fears
of war and an army of cowardly thoughts. Finding
epiphany in blood hard paps
he was baptised, immersed in attar glow,
its font the valley between her breasts.

Fumbling with the stuff that men are made of,
fingers unsure, yet she would persist
and cupping the emanation in her palm,
touched lips to it, as in communion.
Orisoned eyes belied love was so casually
christened, scant hours from the time
they'd met, outside a recruiting hall. "Write,"
she pleaded against the bus motor's roar,
the answer—and he—forever lost to her.

Killing Time in Bosnia

This is how they wait in Sarajevo, while
Good Morning America flickers across the tube:
primevally crouched, crowding death out from
behind their matted walls, accommodating
scavenged acts of life among the rubble.

Learning to live eye level with roaches,
they assert existence in the classic position,
like Jews and Gypsies did it on the
floors of cattle cars enroute to Hitler's
ovens, in acts of ultimate defiance,
she giving what is plundered from her
sisters, he famished for remission,
hugging the wasted battlements of her breasts.

Others acknowledge impotence, count
the queued hours swapping sniper bullet and
mortar shard for brackish water, the difference
spelled out inches from where they stand;
light years from where we watch.

Paradox

Before he died in that Leyte ditch
Wisner sat, insides in his hands,
perhaps remembering how he once
palmed the globes of satin breasts, warmth
slowly oozing down until, loin
deep, something left him. I wonder if
he heard the Manoag woman as she
bore her baby in a ditch nearby?
A medic handed him to me,
put warm little buttocks in my palms.

Remembering Leyte

“D” Day Quintennial—June 6, 1995

This muted coast is half a world
away from Normandy’s cadaver draped
impediments, flaunting disrespect
at an army awash in the North Sea’s
fuming margin. Here we find a scene
of silent desolation reeking
green, its stillness shattering
the bombardment’s aftermath. No
bobbing corpsed flotilla here, our
flotsam disarrays this beach like littered
remnants of a spent cyclone’s rage.

Entrenched beyond the lapped surf’s reach,
our qualms are ill displayed and parallel
the shore in skeptical disorder, sore
emotions at the ready. Pennsylvania
ploughboy on the right, his Quaker
parents’ sermons against killing still
troublingly recalled, ill timed
advice for one in thrall with death, so young.
Others strung out to the left, Maynard,
Kwalsky and the rest invest their
cringing currency with valor, lately
squeezed from mother’s milk.

Then above
the fifty caliber’s chattering complaint,
a faint “O shit, I’m hit; Medic!” and
lips numb til now acknowledge thirst,
as each burst’s quickening pace confirms
that some of us will never leave this place.