

I saw the mother
Of a son slain
Eighteen, hardly more
At the grave, in '68
We were late to the ceremony

There it was, a casket
A flag draped over
A hole encasing
And a mother, inconsolable
Two brothers and a sister, so we guessed, wept with her

And then taps played
Four rifles rang out! – each once, twice, thrice and last
Startling the sunny summer Sunday
Then resounding down the hillsides of Syracuse
Insistent echoes
As if the rifles were not yet satisfied with their work

Till merely whispers met our ears
Till none, even, of those
Insinuating a hollow and terrible silence into the scene
And for an instant enveloping it in a perverse, macabre consonance
With the silence of he who lay at our feet

The flag then folded, and triangularly presented
But suddenly finding itself summarily thrust to the ground
By the grieving mother
And accompanied, in almost the same motion, by a hard right
As best as she could muster
And as best as she could see
To the face of the stunned captain

Then a melee – explosive, chaotic, engulfing
The captain down, the mother down
The flag heeled into the ground by a son
The same ground, it is so abhorrent to say, which the one of eighteen
now tasted
And from which he would forever sup

I wish I could find her today
So that I could tell her I wanted no part of it
And indeed had mitigated the multiple indignities of the day's
proceedings
In a small way to be sure
A way she was, of course, never to know
Nor, so rightly, ever to care