

Just Positions

Often in the beginning of my classes  
we exchanged duties. I didn't mind  
being captured: my teen-aged enemies  
dressed nicer, had more cash,  
and tried to save the Amazon  
by cancelling compositions.  
Class became freer--trapped,  
I was the Quaker Oats Man, thinning  
into flaky darkness. Restless,  
I marched on Washington D.C.  
and the Vietnam Memorial's  
alarmed edges failed to cure heat.  
I wore the black tennis shoes  
that my brother died in. Young men  
chased frisbees and wheezing dogs  
and beautiful Asian girls stared at the names:  
Mathew O'Brien. Thomas Hill. Edward Rizzo.

Every so often I lean out  
into the sun's glare and search  
for my friends, gone now  
for twenty years. My students  
wear Guess Jeans and giggle  
like children at carnivals.  
At each class's end, one asks:  
"Stranger, which have you come to steal?"  
My hands are full of books

("Just Positions," cont., no break)

and aspirin as I stare at the memorial.  
These words will never be my words.  
I go downtown for drinks and dinner  
and pass secret notes to students,  
warning of history, spring's falseness,  
and men named Dick with wide ties.

We are all, I hint, helpless  
to leave the jail sentence of the present.  
The sun goes way down, a reggae band  
hitchhikes toward the stage,  
and spotlights hack holes in the walls.  
A mistaken blonde slides  
on the dancefloor near the notes  
of freedom. I rise and join her  
and we mouth the wrong words  
to "I Shot The Sheriff." She jumps  
onstage to answer the applause  
and I revise the dancesteps  
by raising my tired arms, aiming,  
cocking, and shooting her head.  
I have never felt love like this before.  
My gimlet has disappeared. Evaporation?  
CIA? I go back and walk up  
the memorial's hill and the cement  
rears and stops me. I search  
for unruly series of footsteps

(Cont.)

("Just Positions," cont., no break)

that would possibly lead me home.

It is colder and darker

and my brother's screaming

generously begins in my throat.