

Will Walker

Outside the Window

I hate the living. You, dear reader, excepted,
provisionally, pending further analysis
of the usual problem areas, beginning with odor assessment;
what the black and white faux medical TV experts
loved to call halitosis; regrettable sports attachments;
political fixations; odd fits of snorting laughter;

an affectation of familiarity and love for the obscure tribe
of pygmies, gorillas, or nicotine-drenched Frenchmen
or demoiselles with whom you spent your adventurous
twenties,
fighting off dysentery, climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, and learning
to say
All men are brothers in fluent and lyrical Swahili.

Tonight, though, right outside the window, lurks a figure
of the usual unfortunate sort, a little maelstrom
of insanity induced by God knows what cocktail
of hormonal, chemical, and circumstantial misfortune,
perhaps a spokesman for some truly psychotic deity
or fallen angel, the Hornèd One or worse, not malevolent by
plan
but in such pain he curses at the shadows, as if to cow them,
herd them away from his stinking threadbare foul-mouthed self,

and we—so the experts tell us, unless they're true followers
of St. Francis—can do nothing except stay inside, silent,
unmoved, enjoying the end of an uneventful day, hoping
for him to get help somehow, but first to please move on.

Batting Practice at Stanyan Park

Somewhere close by just over a hundred years ago
someone is taking batting practice at Stanyan Park,
an hour before game time. Is it Lefty O'Doul, swinging

from the heels, launching ball after ball toward our front
steps,
into the living room, or maybe creaming a real screamer
that bounces all the way into the backyard and settles
in the little kingdom under our apple tree? Hard to tell,

we're perched somewhere in the cheap seats removed
more than a century from the peanuts and Cracker Jacks,
somewhere deep in the outfield, perhaps we'll never know

if it's left or center or right, maybe it doesn't matter
where they stuck home plate, or if the Seals
ever played down the block, or if the field was still
green and tended when our house was built

before subdivisions and the Influenza and The Great War,
before Mickey Mantle's grandfather ever heard of baseball,
before Babe Ruth or Tyrus Cobb, when it was still

just a game, and someone who maybe knew my grandfather
in his prime was sitting in the stands talking about the real
'49ers

and watching the high lazy flies leap off that long-since
broken bat

and head into a future only a few hundred feet away,

but always out of sight, even if he squinted to see it.