

Dog Tag

In the mouth
& the jaws
back-handed slam
by the coroner-man
because of the rigor
because he was sick
of the shelling assembly
all gone to this:
My buddy beneath the sheet,
Father Priest
Seminary fresh,
Before war interrupted
His divine course,
His calling of healing
Somehow passed onto me,
Me bathing that body,
The scarlet sponge,
The cup to drink
From his white back's stigmata
And the unholy bullet
For his good gurgling mercy...

What are bruises upon the spirit
When the spirit is clean
Of the wound itself now
And those winter fields where,
Like Jesus, he fell,
Fell into the blessing snows?

That was under clear midnight.
That could have been a Christmas carol,
The angels of stars
Passing blue shadows ghostly
While in the found tub
Of a mansion abandoned
To gunfire between trees,
My friend's flesh glowed golden,
A Rembrandt by torchlight
In a hall of untouched portraits,
The faces painted and loved
Like no others-----
Blood of our blood,

**Cross on the brow,
Above the heart
As if his brass tag
Was stained glass,
And the day was Ash Wednesday.**