

good poetry

I received a dozen poems in the morning mail.  
12 masterpieces from a second generation immigrant,  
and I didn't want to believe  
that so much genuine history could come so consistently.  
I tried to take a shower and dismiss it,  
tried to smother the flame:  
the soap --  
slimy on my arms and legs,  
running down my neck,  
running down between the canyons of my toes,  
between my legs and down the silver drain,  
between Poland and a speedy train to London,  
the soap made it sting --  
as if I had his poetry in my eyes.  
there were the images of voiceless mothers  
in black trunks,  
naked Italians on Ellis Island,  
an army of irregulars  
who would only have made it into print  
the day their obituary was drafted by a novice reporter,  
was it not for this trafficker in words,  
as I've heard it said, who  
has sent me to the showers.  
good poets are Hitlers of the mind.  
while towelling,  
I realized that his best poems  
were yet to be written.

-- John Kay

Long Beach, CA

flak

when Bob went over to Nam  
I figured he was ready  
for the killing  
he was always talking about  
killing anyway  
usually it was himself  
he wanted to kill  
along with former teachers  
former employers  
& five or six old girl  
friends.

an existential hoodlum  
a blue eyed con man  
he read Plato & Sartre

he read Camus  
got into knife fights  
in the street  
made it with more girls  
than the rest of us  
dreamed of.

something was on fire  
at the core of him  
anyone who went near  
felt that fire.

in his artillery unit he  
smoked a lot of grass  
watching the pretty colors  
in the sky  
smoked a lot of grass &  
caught some flak one time  
I think that's what you  
call it, flak.

his right eye ruined for good  
they shipped him home  
with some pretty medals  
he could only half see.

now we sit in the Wagon Wheel  
drinking draft beer &  
watching the pretty colors  
of a Hamm's Beer sign.

Bob seldom talks about the war  
but sometimes when he's drunk  
he bitches about gooks & commies  
& demonstrators  
he bitches about buddhists &  
dead buddies.

he talks about making something  
of himself  
some day.

he never looks at you  
when he talks anymore.

the spittoon

my slovak grandfather had this friend  
he knew him from the old country  
I think  
they looked a lot alike  
the two friends  
& they'd sit in the living room  
sit stiffly in stuffed chairs  
never looking relaxed  
at times they hardly looked alive