

ii.

at chucker's bar the local motorcycle rats line up their beers and scowl a lot. everyone mocks them openly. the story goes that they went out with chains to whup a seventy-year-old recluse and he put ten of them in the hospital. the tuscaloosa bikers don't scare nobody -- they're good for laughs is all.

iii.

things are a bit behind the times in tuscaloosa. the flower children still hate blacks. by dope the kids mean dr. pepper. the college newspaper has just begun to satirize the president. a poll shows 38% of the students oppose the war in vietnam. the women's libbers are demanding a sadie hawkins dance. a historian, in protest against the treaty of versailles, has emigrated to paree.

iv.

jim smith is an engineer at north american. he has hair half-way down his back, but wore a short-hair wig to the job interview. he must be one helluvanengineer because they haven't fired him. he's also a helluva pool player, a helluva guy. quiet, introspective, he has recently begun analysis. he says it's difficult, being from tuscaloosa. he complains particularly of a sense of deja vu.

to our leader

look, i know you don't like football, but the sport has its instructional, its edifying side. some players, for instance, especially in the waning afternoons of their careers, become what is known as cheap-shot artists.

these are the guys who have lost a step in quickness, and the rookies have begun to overtake them, and sometimes they have lost their nerve as well -- they can't come head-on anymore.

and so they compensate by piling-on,
by cracking back, by pulling the face mask.
everyone loses his respect for them,
the fans, the sportswriters, their fellow-players,

and they lose their self-respect as well.
they become defensive, sneering, hyper-critical.
they give a lot of brittle parties.
they boast a lot when they drink.

well i read your poem about the party
and it was a lot of crap,
the loose yellow variety that flows
so freely of a morning after.

you whine about the professors, the tenth-rate poets --
christ, who the fuck invited them?
time and again, you demonstrate your need for such
people;
you seem to need them more than you used to.

with gracelessly aging poets,
our literary cheap-shot artists,
wit and honesty seem
simultaneously to depart

to be replaced by diatribe and self-congratulation.
perhaps beer shouldn't be allowed
to poets before thirty, after thirty-five.
i'd hate to think so,

but you're writing beery crap of late
which was not always the case,
although you were never in the same league
with hemingway, your hero.

no, you were just the best
the old pacific coast league had to offer --
a sort of little-mag steve bilko, fanning often,
but annually leading the league in doubles.

nah, you were better than that,
and still are; you're just not as good as you think.
and you have a habit of coming on one way in letters,
another in poems.

i'm sure you're aware of that
and that you excuse it in yourself.
you excuse everything in yourself,
while magnifying others' lapses.

i'll shut up now, save my energy
for survival. if i'm unfair
in the above, i apologize.
i have a lingering esteem for you.