

he's so expert at his craft the promoter
tells him what he wants.
if there's been no cuts all night,
marty can bleed like Ali McGraw's heart.
after a dearth of knockdowns,
he can play the canvas like a trampoline.
you like snorting? he'll sound like porky pig.
is footwork your thing? he'll give you
Willie Pep, Fred Astaire, or Sugar Ray.

of course, nobody watches. the customers
are all filing out. he plays to their backs.

later at home his wife will ask:
"How'd it go tonite, hon?"
"Terrific! My new fall makes such a thud
five people actually turned around."

-- Charles Stetler

Long Beach CA

SANTA CLAUS COMES DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN

a thermos of vodka under his arm
and his girlfriend braced beneath the other
we three ambled down a 1000 steps
toward the crowded dinning room

for his poetry reading. he said to her:
"someday you will give readings
and you won't need booze. this is my courage --
you were born with it."

after a few more steps he continued:
"they want to drain every immortal drop of
my blood, and I've got to give it to
them. I'll let them ask questions

after each poem." we arrived
at the room and I guided him to the
stage where he immediately sat down
and poured himself a drink.

I crossed my legs and listened as
the master of wordsmen and toughness
tried to give away some of his spoiled blood;
his \$300 check folded in my shirt pocket.

someone asked him to sing melancholy baby
so he broke forth a few bars, then someone
brought up the free press and he said:
"the free press is shit and people only

buy it to read me." he went on coveting
his thermos and 35 minutes from word one
he was mumbling inaudibly and nearly
fell from the stage.

I looked over at stetler who had been
laughing all evening, then I looked back to
the face of one of the ugliest men alive
and wondered: is there some sort of sacrifice

going on here? knowing, that in the end there would
be no forgetting his scarred face and performance.
what he had been in his books was the real McCoy.
I see santa claus coming down from the mountain.

OFFSPRING

three red and green rattlesnakes snap
at each other across my back
but never touch

life has been an army of pepper
marching on my lungs

my mother is now locked in a padded
cell where she sculpts
and reads the classics
beneath an unshaded light

my querulous father buys
3 quarts of oso negro in mexico
each month
and is racked with varicose veins
and premature baldness

i am here by myself
with three restless rattlers dancing
across my shoulder blades

doing all i can to overcome
my genetics
and sing my own song

WINGS

-- for Robert Peters

on a tour of the house
i was taken from room to room
a drawing of three dead
elephants resting in african grass