

loosened his Italian silk scarf,  
wiped a trickle of blood from his cheek  
& said:

Do you fellows know  
that this is the very same town  
where Lt. Frederic Henry  
met that beautiful English nurse  
in A Farewell to Arms?

I was only a dumb corporal at the time,  
but this news didn't exactly stun me to numbness;  
I already knew that the officers  
always got the best looking women,

but this Farewell to Arms thing  
was something else,  
it really had me puzzled:

I thought I had hit  
every goddam saloon  
in that lousy burg.

#### THE RAT IN A TRAP

I'm drinking a lousy local Chablis  
at this progressive cocktail party  
where the white stuff  
in the silver bowl  
isn't sugar,  
you know,

when this bronzed incendiary,  
who is also a female advertising exec,  
swoops over & froths:  
"Darling! What are you into these days?"

"I'm working for REDCOM XXII in Seattle,"  
I tell her.

"Wonderful!" she gushes. "Is that one  
of those new politically progressive  
ecology magazines?"

"No," I say. "It's the naval warfare  
Readiness Command."

"Oh, dear," she fizzles. "Whatever do you do there?"

"I'm an administrator," I say,  
"in the Recruiting Directorate."

"GOD!" she squeals. "How did you ever get yourself into that trap?"

"Well," I say, "once it was thought I had some novels in me, but it turned out they were only poems."

& then the party resumes  
despite my presence.

#### THE LINEUP

She comes into the Blue Beard room  
where I do my writing  
& stands behind my chair.

I stop typing & stare ahead at the wall  
with the next line hanging by a hair  
& wait,  
but she doesn't say anything.

"Yeah?" I say finally.

"I was thinking ..." she says.

"About?" I say.

"The pictures of those people," she says,  
"that you have there above your desk.  
They all committed suicide."

"So?" I say.

"It worries me," she says.

She's right, of course, on Hart Crane,  
Van Gogh, Hemingway, Suckling  
& Harry Crosby,  
but she chooses to ignore the fact  
that both Pound & Henry Miller  
died of old age.

Then she's gone  
& so is the next line;  
in fact, the whole goddamned poem  
starts falling apart.

I tear out the sheet  
& stomp downstairs waving my arms.

"What's the matter?" she asks.