

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.