

THREE POEMS



Robert Mezey

TEA DANCE AT THE NAUTILUS HOTEL (1925)

The gleam of eyes under the striped umbrellas—
We see them still, after so many years,
(Or think we do),—the young men and their dears,
Banding forward glances as through masks
In the curled bluish haze of panatellas,
And taking nips from little silver flasks.

They sit at tables as the sun is going,
Bent over cigarettes and lukewarm tea,
Talking small talk, gossip and gallantry,
Some of them single, some husbands and wives,
Laughing and telling stories, all unknowing
They sit here in the heyday of their lives.

And some then dance off in the late sunlight,
Lips brushing cheeks, hands growing warm in hands,
Feet gliding at the lightest of commands,
All summer on their caught or sighing breath
As they whirl on toward the oncoming night,
And nothing further from their thoughts than death.

But they danced here sixty-five years ago!—
Almost all of them must be underground.
Who could be left to smile at the sound
Of the oldfangled dance tunes and each pair
Of youthful lovers swaying to and fro?
Only a dreamer, who was never there.

on a painting by Donald Justice

JOE SIMPSON

Joe Simpson was a man I scarcely knew.
I saw him when he came to see his father.
Our talks, if they were talks, were brief and few.
And yet I think I knew the man, or rather,
I knew something about him. From his eyes
A certain light (though uncertain to me)
Seemed to precede him through the world of lies,
Flickering shadows where he could not see
What might await, what writhing shapes of pain,
What narrow passages, where only faith,
That cannot know what it is faithful to,
Can find the right path to the gates of death,
A path he followed, and did not complain,
A path that might lead nowhere, as he knew.

VARIATION ON A THEME

My hands have made this monument—
Bronze will tarnish before it will.
Smaller than all the glass towers,
Winds cannot shake it, even the strongest,
And the rains powerless, rain and time,
The endless dripping of the years
That wears down everything to nothing.
This body will go down to dust,
But death not touch these slender lines.
As long as boys make war and girls
Bow to the biddings of the goddess,
As long as my native city stands
And one forgotten neighborhood,
And the sluggish Delaware flows on,
I shall not altogether perish,
Who helped to keep the meters live.
The honor, if any, will not be mine;
Not mine but yours, creator spirit,
Yours the making hands, the laurel.

after Horace

