

War Baby

After I came beginningless
into Illinois in 1943
as a first-born joy,
I drank World War II in
with my sweet mother's milk.

Bombs were dropping quietly
behind her caring embrace
and exploding in her
goodnight kiss.
I breathed her worried love
and thought it was air
if I thought at all.

Twenty-five times my father
thrust his B-17 "Spot Remover"
carrying ten trembling airmen
through German defenses
and sowed the karmic seeds
of a quick explosive harvest--
while I was piling up wooden blocks
and hearing rhymes
about moons and spoons
and thumbs and plums.

So much war-worried gentleness
was transmitted
by my mother's reassuring smile
that perhaps I heard small
voices back in my throat
screaming for mercy
as they laughed.

My father came home
a new stranger
who wanted to be king
of the little home
my mother and I had shared.
Who was this intruder,
this usurper?
He wrecked our delicate bond
with his love
and his jubilant grief
after peace was declared
with Hitler tucked into a coffin.

I wanted to play with cars
and building blocks like before
but my father dared
to order me around
like a bomber crew
and have me bring him things.

Wasn't it about then
that I learned
to kill flies?