

A Return to Silence

by Robert Kloss

We pulled them from peat bogs and funeral parlors and text books. Men of dust and cobwebs and feathers, their long fine hairs like corn silk. We duded them up. Picked the roaches from their skulls and smoothed their woolen outfits. They brought us our coffees and jelly rolls. They opened our doors and dusted our pantries. For our goodness and care they disappeared from their bedrooms and bunkhouses while we slept. They trammed the cornfields and burned fires in the prairies. Living lanterns strung throughout the night. They erected their canvass and leather tents along the valley of ashes. They crafted rifles from their memories and carved bullets from fossils gathered. They culled life from the skies and dealt it to the soil. Bodies of pigeons ducks geese robins finches jays and gulls piled into neat mounds that from a distance seemed clay hovels or mud huts. As if living men could dwell within those birds like worms burrowed through the dirt. As if men were meant to live within the figures of death. They crouched by the rivers panning for gold with ashtrays clenched in their wire hands. They crouched chewing what they called *tobacco* but was actually clay and hay. They cried aloud for the Indians and Germans and Buffalo they had killed. If they could dance they would dance to raise the ghosts of their obliterated foes.

They dreamed of chatting amicably before murdering them anew.

They wandered our towns covered in blood and feathers. They searched apartment houses for the general stores of their youths, propositioned house wives for rat poison and corn meal and baked beans. On the street they stopped men in suits, wondered what happened to Myra's cathouse? Stooped to little boys: where did the malted milk shakes go?

We knew if we captured them with cattle prods and barbed wire.
If we banished them to an island off the coast of Canada.
Constructed cages of iron and silence. Bound them in the rain and
the solitude. We knew if the rain waters washed free the dust and
bird nests. We knew their wire fists would remain, rusting slow in
the elements.

They would call for their hounds. Wild dogs, loyal and intent. The
beasts would forge through the waves and the beaches. Slobbering
as they burrowed under the black stone walls. Into the cages with
glistening maws, unhinged and yellow. Freed, the men would ride
the dogs across the waves. Bloody mange disturbed in their wire
hands.

Instead we dunked the men in vats of grease and boiling water.
Instead we tore apart the books from which they emerged. Instead
we found the graves of their mothers and detonated bombs.

Now, over their graves are considered shopping malls. Now over
their graves we burn a city of tires.

Again we have silence. Now, gone, is the crackling sound.

