

I Got Back Exhausted

A poem to be read twice in succession

Hale Chatfield

I got back exhausted
and sat down and poured myself some wine.
I thought, Maybe I ought to write her a letter
saying "I did that for you; I even
did *that* for you." And then I thought,
What's the use? She knows. She was nailing
us up with kisses in the kitchen, and all
the time that kid was out there,
and it was getting harder and harder to breathe.

I poured some more wine
and decided that in fact
I *would* write you something.
Even now you are reading it.
You read: the cross was an instrument
in wide use for the purpose of executing
criminals found guilty of a variety of
crimes ranging from theft to treason.
You read: it killed by suffocation,
as the weakening victim drowned
in his own weight, and you are finding it
harder and harder to breathe.

The boy knew, you said.
He didn't look like he knew much,
but I took him out and shot him anyway.
For you. He didn't look like he knew much
when I buried him, either. But he knew enough
by then I guess. I thought maybe I'd write
asking, "Are you *sure*?"--but I should
have asked that a long time ago,
before there was anything to know:
before you took me in your arms
and kissed me as I reached for a piece of paper
to write all of this, and I began it:
I got back exhausted

1978-79, 73 Ohio Poets