
“...DYING OF THE LIGHT” / *Keith Allen Artrip*

Somewhere between murder and mercy
 I dawdle, Morrill Hall darkened
 to the color and consistency
 of Kaopectate, waiting
 for a friend kept late in the lab
 typing his gospel. (Yes, I know.)
 But he called it his creed, “Gentle Soldier,”
 then wandered off to find an I.B.M.
 He’s been up there ever since. A soldier
 born too late for any war save books
 —and vivid imagination.
 (“Vietnam was a fascist war.”)

We kill ourselves with self-defense.
 A *Lantern* spread on my lap
 reveals a young behaviorist,
 his corrective lenses intent:
 a mottled rat on tiptoe dunks
 a cotton ball, while half-imagined
 Pavlov and Skinner stand just out of sight,
 arm around shoulders like Siamese twins,
 smiling, benevolent, almost lordly in lab coats,
 marking each subject’s state.

We choose our hells. Mine? Old violence
 picked fresh from the garden each day;
 I would wait for old friends in dim halls
 reading newspapers forever, and each night
return home
 to passionless clasp of hand or shoulder,
 the comfortable niche of father’s recliner,
 week-old *Star Trek* on Adelphia Cable;
 a late supper. And after a shower,
 cheap fiction by bedside lamp.

But here comes the gospel-writer now,
 assured smile, hand waving a paper,
 his white flag with fine print
 I ignore to escape. Outside
 the western sun hangs over the horizon

like an old man holding his bald head
above a windowsill, *discovering*
he has the wrong house, yet lingering,
fascinated by his mistake.