

## **Going Out Hard**

By Thomas Bartlett Whitaker

Tank said he was going  
to go out hard  
out fighting  
“the way I done come up.”  
His knuckles look like  
a mountain range:  
torn, serrated.  
Fearsome.  
Like he’s been preparing for this  
all his life  
- if 24 years can be called a life.

Dayroom jive-talk  
adrenaline talk  
amygdala talk.  
Tragicomic currency  
stamped with the seal  
of a whore’s promises,  
of a politician’s smile.  
You learn to erect  
a mental umbrella,  
to patiently and stoically  
observe the rising tide of  
bullshit  
before becoming a one-man  
submarine  
swallowed thoughts beyond sight.  
Safe.  
Or, at least,  
what passes for safe  
around here.

Thoughts like:  
“you didn’t come up very far  
motherfucker  
if they are about to cart your ass off to the Walls.”  
Thoughts like:  
“pretty bird was tweeting  
a different tune  
when B-Down stuck you  
like a hog  
for stealing his kite.”  
And, always, because it

makes me address my own  
solipsistic delusional bullshit existence  
(no hypocrite am I):  
“the Potters field  
they are about to use  
to hide the poisoned wreck  
that was once your “I”  
looks eerily like the places  
you played in as a child  
beyond the suburban sprawl  
(cops and robbers, you always  
played the cop,  
ironically)  
where you first learned  
how you can’t be lost  
if you don’t belong anywhere  
and then  
how to be  
completely  
insignificant.”

But of course,  
you don’t say that  
any of that.  
You let them do  
all the talking,  
dispensing aporias and  
all the variegated shades  
of used and abused  
etceteras.

Because you already know  
-don’t you? –  
How it will go down:  
the bowed cowed head  
the blank angus-eyes  
seeing what is left of life  
walking away from him  
one step  
at a time.  
A warden and a captain  
on each arm,  
smiling:  
the apotheosis  
of meticulously orchestrated  
murder.

And a priest, of course;  
they don't ever bother to smile.

Later:  
the radio news  
caressing my consciousness  
like sackcloth,  
homemade antennae wires  
strung along my cell walls  
like a web of lifelines;  
I will hear the same  
generic, pathetic, derivative  
(oh, so human!)  
plea for forgiveness  
for absolution, searching  
for some kernel of truth  
at the end  
and finding only  
epistemological Ponzi schemes  
and gods made of crackers  
with blood that gets you drunk  
(inebriated, not on the Numinous  
but rather on simple biochemistry).  
There will be the promise  
to see everyone  
again some-day-soon  
"on the other side."  
Where the love of Jesus  
(or Allah or Krishna  
or Anubis  
or Odin  
or Kuski-banda  
or any of the other  
worm-eaten, exhausted  
selections on sale  
in the Shopping Mall of  
Theological Nonsense)  
permeates the ether.  
Yet another Cell Warrior  
"gone out fighting."  
I finish eating my soup.