

WILLIAM VARNER

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## At The Veteran's Cemetery

I stumbled, spilling beer and ash  
Over your Croatian name  
The one my mother could never pronounce.  
Drunk, too, for the funeral  
An old friend of ours telling me  
It was okay to cry and in my head  
I muttered "Fuck you."

Jeff, it's summer's end again here,  
Thin stones, broken statuary  
Over in the old part of the cemetery  
Grateful for the hum of the lawnmower  
Some guy with red earphones  
Scything his weed eater  
Around dates and names  
Bleached white from seasons.

The soul is not like smoke; it is  
Amniotic, swaddled  
In a hospital rag.  
Dried. Then gone.  
Caskets are a waste  
Of good wood and money.  
And only for the living.

## Fresh Violence

Detroit Metro, the black jumbotron  
flat and ignored

mothers walk alone  
their children behind tripping

trying to catch up  
pilots and attendants, black leather briefcases

men talking loud into their hidden headsets  
janitors pushing their overflowing carts

damp brown paper towels  
strewn like the first dead leaves of fall

across the dirty bathroom tile  
smell of piss and mint and disinfectant

sari, burka, blouse, jacket and tie  
moving in dissonant cadence to their gates

anxious reunions just beyond  
the crowded security gate

somewhere in Gaza, Sarajevo, Burma, Sri Lanka  
the anchor questioning the nodding correspondent

security announcements interfering  
with the riot audio, flags burning in high def

“fresh violence” I think he reports  
his words flowers he cuts for us

hour after hour the same headlines play  
weather, death, perpetual flux of markets

protests, blue helmets, contested elections  
delayed flight, delayed again, cancelled

the moving walkways don't stop, even at night  
endless steel tread disappearing

small digital clocks nearly impossible to see  
buried so deep in the departure screens

all returning early morning  
the giant flat eyelid opening, pixels

blooming together beautifully  
to bring us new understaffed hospitals

half-standing buildings, vines of dried blood  
a man on top of a car, one arm held up

machine gunning the air  
as if the sky could feel.

## False Flag

We taxi past Logan's tower rising  
like two shoulders holding up  
neural circuitry and cranial mystery.

In my window seat I think of my mother  
how her friends and all their memories  
dissipate every night in front  
of Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy.

Her comment that a plane crash  
is the way to go.

Takeoff, cabin pressure rising, light  
drizzle. Clouds flat and sculptured  
like hard wet sand at low tide.

I surface-dream of that documentary:  
McNamara, in his eighties, long  
After the jungles and the villages had burned,

confessing about the Gulf of Tonkin, the  
anxious mistakes and bad intelligence  
reduced to explanation and a shrug.

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**WILLIAM VARNER'S** poetry has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Smartish Pace*, and elsewhere. He lives in southern Maine where he works as Managing Editor for a book publisher.