

Bamboo & Lemongrass

Joseph D. Milosch

I woke, read the paper, and thought
about that skinny-old poet, Levine.

Like him, I worked in Detroit.

Played pool
after the swing-shift.

I drank in that bar with its
crossed hockey sticks.

On the wall of the men's room
a poem by Emily Dickenson.

I'd love to meet a woman,
who'd scrawl her poem
above the urinal.

In the spring of '66,

I learned who Emily was.

In my literature class,
melting snow dripped from
the roof, and the professor
read her poem,

'Because I Could Not Stop for Death.'

It became a prophecy
for those soldiering in Nam.
Stateside, I guarded the caskets
of these men, whose dreams
were buried beneath
bamboo and lemongrass.

After the war, I lived
in a foggy, winter dusk
with flagged-cloaked ghosts.
Back in school, my professor
gave me Levine's book,
its cover the color of dried blood.
His poetry didn't help me
through the woodland of crosses –
my labyrinth -
his verse more akin
to a frayed rope for me to grasp.

Joseph D. Milosch's work has appeared in various magazines, including the *California Quarterly*. He has multiple nominations for the Pushcart and received the Hackney Award for Literature. His books: *The Lost Pilgrimage Poems* and *Landscape of a Hummingbird*, were published by Poetic Matrix Press. He is a Vietnam War veteran.