

WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS

The Messengers

In the presence of the violent reality of war,
consciousness takes the place of the imagination.

—Wallace Stevens

We have become experts. This is better than the rifle range,
better than the field where the fallen fell. We congratulate
ourselves at every door as we wade into strange living rooms,

among the tears of mothers wailing through their fingers,
fathers struck silent, watching their knees, children still
young enough to know nothing, dancing around our uniforms,

laughing, happy, but confused by the chagrin in their parents'
faces, mystified by the sudden blot we've brought across their
quiet afternoon. We speak softly. We say the same words over

and over. We salute the flag we've given them and present
them with their metals, before we move on to our next address.

WILLIAM VIRGIL DAVIS'S most recent book, *Landscape and Journey*, has won two prizes—the New Criterion Poetry Prize and the Helen C. Smith Memorial Award for Poetry. He is Professor of English & Writer-in-Residence at Baylor University.