

CHRISTOPHER LEE MILES

Bracing for Threnodies

Machine cacophony and the sick scent
of singed oil fills his ear up to his eye.
He's ensconced in a gasmask, crackwebs
in the plastic, fissuring in the green.

Bracing for threnodies, the fireblasts
from above, a rising red tomahawk
is the one thing worth counting. After all,
this is what he wanted: to return home

with numbers, the twenty-seven tales
of launches: "Yes mother, we are part of this
tell everyone, I am part of this—
whatever it is, I am part." Yesterday,

he went topside for relief from the heat
in the engine room, saw a roseorange sunset
turning the sea to fire. The sea was shoreless,
yet imagined its gruff edge as his father's

calloused palm sweeping bread crumbs
from the breakfast table before he left
for war. When he returns home, he won't
speak of his mistakes, his masculine failures.

How he tremors, how eyewater spills,
welling him with salt. Locked in his mouth,
the fear, carving holes and burrowing
a network like worms beneath a garden.

He'll only mention the sunset: an orange
globe dipping into iceblue far beyond
the salt clusters etching-in his gasmask's
otherwise transparent fullface window.

Set the Atoms Humming and Arrange the Humming

I live in a sanctuary where chandeliers
are a species of hawk perched on the dome
of the sky, pilfering details from the assault.
Everything is examined, outlined in neon
on graph paper, set aside for further study.
I must know how everything moves: how
the altar boy rings the bell in mass; how
the mother possum is fended off with camphor;
how lichen grows in toxic slag heaps; how DC
current drives chemical reactions. I manipulate
the volition of life to end it as howling and placenta-
sapped as it began. My dominion is the foxhole.
A trunk full of ammonium nitrate. Each finger
is a booby trap, a shard of razor shrapnel
aimed at your testicles, your right eyeball,
the base of your spine. Encountering angels,
I expect battered wings, the golden ribs picked
clean by carnivorous toads. I set the atoms
humming and arrange the humming into a chorus
of dirges. Flowers I consider a mark of my lexicon.
Each tooth is pocketed with a starving lion, my shit-
covered tail flails high above the deathsoaked world
as I watch gunshells scream.

CHRISTOPHER LEE MILES grew up on a farm in Minnesota. He served four honorable years in the US Navy, from September 2001 until September 2005. Onboard the *USS Arleigh Burke DDG-51*, he was deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring

Freedom. His poetry has appeared, or is forthcoming, from the following journals: *South Dakota Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Pif Magazine*, and *Connecticut Review*. He lives in Fairbanks, AK.