

FRIENDS

Apollinaire would have said
of my friends:
take them to war,
and I'll go, too.
I loved that fat, little man.
Once I saw him
in his grammar school picture
holding a tuba.

In my dream tonight
I try to stop Trakl
from taking an overdose,
and in the spring of 1842
I am walking along the Neckar
with Holderlin and his attendant,
Holderlin here twenty years now,
his wrists bruised from the straps.
I am so close I could take his picture
as he whispers again and again,
Vater, Vater, komm zuruck. . . .
and stares past the graves
near the river.

Every time I talk
to Hart Crane and Sylvia Plath
their eyes are bulging
and their nostrils flare.
They wish their shadows
could watch over them,
could save them from themselves.
In addition Crane
wants to chain himself down
like Houdini.

Oh, Walt Whitman, sane Walt,
If only you could hear how I repeat you:
In my thirtieth year I think:
this earth is young
and there are worlds to be worlds
out of stars we can't see.
In my thirtieth year,
my grandmother, 76 now,
has a picture of me, ten years old,
in a sailor's suit
on her bedroom dresser.
And for one year today
my father has carried my mother
from bed to toilet.
In my thirtieth year
my only wish, Walt,
is to have a horse of my own,
to feed it the grass,
that, with its sod, with its green,
will darken my hands.



drawing by Jude Ward