

I chewed a toothpick while the dog squatted reflexively
and let out a stream of piss over a skeletal windowframe,
a stained glass of Christ with the halo still intact.
Two blocks down, the Civil Guard, Franco's peace keepers,
whistled down alleys and tested storefront locks as the sun
flecked off their black patent leather caps, their spit-shined
knee-high boots, the blue gun metal of their sub-machine guns.
The street, otherwise abandoned, was even without cars
and the lugubrious Spanish pop songs on radios duelling
window to window. As the two Civil Guard neared the church—
they must not have seen me across the way—I watched them
almost pass but heard two metallic clicks—their safety locks
switched off—and standing, I saw them aim their guns
toward the church, squint through sights, and shoot
such an interminable round of fire that it effaced
the dog, obliterated it except for a black tuft
of its hair which floated horribly up and away
even in that seemingly windless day. The Civil Guard
laughed together, looking at that single tuft of hair
until they heard me say *Jesus Christ*, and eyed me keenly,
brushed by their guns, and laughed again, walking off
in unison, smoke rising neatly behind their shoulders.

THE LAUGHTER OF BOYS

The laughter of boys lights up after school
on the black asphalt parking lot
near my apartment picture window.
It is the cackle of a bonfire, but a fire
that crackles over a stack of green logs,
a sound that comes from so far in
I can't remember when it left.
And when I watch the boys
flick lit matches at each other
and dodge the bites of the yellow-blue flames
that hiss out on the ground like innocence,

I think of my life as burning toward an end.
But it is their laughter vibrating the glass
which I want to take back inside me.
It is the restlessness of being young.
If I could laugh in the company of myself
and not feel that other person inside me
holding his breath, saying *Be careful,*
don't embarrass yourself, then I might turn away
from the fatherly whistle that splits up the boys
like sparks and not watch them cup matchlight
under their chins, each a ghostly mask
bobbing home, dimming out as boys do.