

Wilbur on the Trampoline · *John Engels*

I was there that night in '56
when, his long arms flapping, he bounced hard
and high, and higher on the trampoline.
Caught in the porch light, there in Engle's yard,

grinning in the yellow light, teeth shining,
high-shouldered Wilbur—arms held up and wide
like thin wings sprouting outward from his skull—
faltered, and lost in vigorous midflight

his balance, and came widely straddling down,
one long leg to each side of the wooden
frame—so delicate a clearance that he gasped.
As for me, I shrivelled where I stood:

in my short-legged circumstance I would have borne
more than a body ought to bear, I knew,
most likely perishing right then and there,
of my three souls most surely losing two.

But praising God and Goodness, Wilbur rose
and leaped, as limber as before. And in the dull
light of recollection what I choose to see
is the winged, the resurrectionary skull

which in the instant he has come to seem:
heart-mouthed death's-head, toothy, winged,
flying the long reach back into that night
from which I hear the measured squawking of the springs,

some far-off traffic noises, and a dog
moaning from the lawn's far darks—no other sound
as Wilbur leaps and dangerously tumbles,
high and higher, bounding and rebound.