

## Gettysburg

*September 21 2022*

Before the dawn one evening, I went down  
to Jackson city, to remember why we here  
do not live there. It was a cool miseducation  
in the ways of segregation, but it was not  
what those elsewhere like to say. I saw a people,  
many hungry, some devoted, some misguided, one or two  
with hope to spare – in other words, they were a people  
like the rest. True, they owned slaves, or those  
before them did, but this fact cannot be washed away  
with any amount of blood. We ought to know by know  
that history is fickle, and remains despite our sternest glare.  
There is no way to make it vanish. Nonetheless,  
we can move forward, and have done it, though  
with golden thread to bring us home. Have you observed  
how every poem stacked in order waits in reserve?  
They are like people under the lash of cold machines.  
Our words have suffered. They have lied to you,  
although they had no choice. The words are not  
the problem, though they are a symptom, and I hope by now  
you know the disease. I am at ease to write,  
it's true, but we are not at ease while living,  
and eternal life makes us less easy still. Before the dawn,  
consider what can still be spoken, and,  
more troublingly, think what can speak no more.  
It is the silence calling us this time of night.  
Beware the apathy of drowning in the noise.  
I hear the call of many chain-gangs in the wind.  
I hear their rattle, and they will not be ignored  
but seek no vengeance. They would like to sleep again  
and be released at last from pain. Could we oblige them?  
I think so, though it would take a serious effort  
and one not like what we've dared to try before.

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I do not believe in Lincoln. I cannot.  
He was a feckless Hegelian, couched in Biblical tones.  
He did not govern well. I've said it and will  
say it again, he cowed to violence, could not admit

that states wished to secede. Oh, what a sneaky devil,  
blind in the face of the obvious. There is no forthcoming millenium  
where all peoples of all colors live as one. De Tocqueville  
said so. Yet we try and try and try. I do not know  
what else we could try, but we at least could notice the obvious,  
that humans are still human despite the violence.  
We are here, as we have always been, as prone to hate as love.  
It will not change. What wars are necessary to teach this once and for all?  
I fear the answer as I fear the blight of winter.

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Why am I here, able neither to remember  
nor forget? To absorb solemnity left  
by dying men? Or to be thoughtful  
about how little we know? These men,  
brave men no doubt, died hard, but why?  
Should we dare also to die? Again? But why?

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Had Freedom died? Or was it just then mortally struck?  
Why was the new birth *necessary*, and could it be needed again?  
And needed by whom? I may digress, but you would not forgive  
serenity at a time like this, when lady liberty labors  
to bring life into the world. Would we, then, also  
be reborn? Some time ago was one, and yet  
another, who spoke hauntingly of birth. Where have they gone?  
Where have *we* gone? I think old freedom lives  
and could not be *reborn*, for it was never born.  
It merely *is*, beyond the pale of all that ever  
comes to womb. It merely is, on its own terms,  
in its own time. Say Lincoln knew this.  
Likely he'd forgotten, like most others  
of his day, but say he knew it. Could we have  
a greater leader? Could mankind then rise past folly  
after all? Just say he knew it. Say he knew it  
for the scores of years of bloodshed we've endured.  
War is not pretty, no, but neither is our peace.  
The fools immortalize his words, against the wishes  
of those very words. I'd have this plaque removed,  
along with all the noisy monuments, and rather  
listen closely as the ghosts here tell their tale.

