

Shadowboxer

rearview mirror
tells me things
backward and behind

I see myself,
my eyes read
disappointed

though there is a light behind them

it is the flame from my heart

I can see it dancing,
unwilling to go out,
strutting like a cocky prizefighter
to the ring

(you looked so beautiful
in the Christmas tree light)

thoughts of somewhere and someone
commandeer me,
skillfully making me forget
the many joys I lay claim to

but then
like some figment of white noise
came movement

the corner of my eye
tugged the pupil sideways

behind me
were mad arms
flailing like blender blades

a fiery dot
lost among night

a man shadow boxing,
a cigarette clinched in his mouth,
his foul brown mouth

but what struck me about him
was the way in which he punched the air

it was as if he weren't on a sidewalk
with the entire world as witness,
but as if he were alone
looking in his bathroom mirror (where most men are strongest)

he did not mind that he looked mad
he did not mind that he was doing what
a million men had done before him

he fought for different reasons

he fought
not because he was caught
between the gears of life,
quite the opposite, in fact

he fought
because he had been freed from them

and now he stretched his wings
like some great bird

and I admired
his fight

(I can still feel your fingers
on my face)

I wished
that I too
could fight
like him

indifferently

cut loose
from all sense
of shame

perfectly
stained

and
I watched him
in the rear view mirror
until he
stopped punching
and the fire within him
resumed in its
slow and steady burn

(I love you)

and I took refuge in
that he was out there

living among the
unbearably sad world

a world full of people who accepted
“too late”

and my own self pity
appeared to be so small
and infantile
compared to him

how that beautiful man would laugh at me
if he knew my ailment

“a woman?”
he’d say

“ha.”

and as he crushed
the hot red cherry of his cigarette
with the rubber heel of his boot

smashing it into the concrete curb
and the cold wind blew the ashes about (the kind of weather good for saw blades)

I wished him the best
not only for his sake,
but for mine

...keep fighting,
 fighter