

He walks, head down,
looks at the sidewalk cracks,
and not at the ones
in the bold Belfast Pax
that looms beside him
as he makes his way
to who knows where.
to a job? a cafe?
do you think he thinks
how the word's defined,
as what it is not—
not roads that are mined,
not wars that are waged,
not innocents slaughtered,
not races erased,
not whole nations foddered?
do you think what it means
means even a wit
as he walks, head down,
to a long-awaited sit
in a pub to discuss
Saturday's scrums,
then handshakes and hugs
with all of his chums
before he's gone again?
do you think that's all
that's going on here?
do you think that's all?



Well, i'll take those strikes
of yellow and white
that were written in haste
in the heart of the night.
i'll take the kiss stolen,
dance danced and song heard,
in spaces between
the letters of the word—
in moments between
the signal and the noise.
a couple of laughs and
pints with the boys?
a couple of couplets
to break up the prose?
you bet i'll take it,
whatever it shows.
do i think he thinks
how **the word** is defined?
or how **the world** works
even enters his mind?
if he takes it in stride,
that word on the wall?
or walking, head down,
does he take it all?
well, i'll take it, now,
on a plate, with a beer.
no, don't wrap my peace
—i'll just eat it here.

e.e.brower 1999

Special thanks to Imperial Litho, Phoenix, AZ for the printing; Cellar Ideas, San Jose, CA for the design; and the New York Times for the photograph.



E.E.Brower