

SUDDEN OR SLOW BUT SURE

Wounded by shrapnel in France
six decades back, he's still
recovering from trauma caused
by trauma.

In every book
by Edward Wood he resurrects
the pain.

When Hemingway received
the wound that made him think
at Fassalta de Liave, the outcome
was the same: re-living
and re-telling what was sudden,
merciless and permanent.

It's not
confined to war.

Preparing
for a trip to Europe, Reynolds
Price complained of cramping
in his lower back.

X-rays
confirmed a shadow.

Days
later he awoke from surgery
a paraplegic.

Shock was the first
response, then transformation.

Bernard
Costello cased his saxophone
to specialize in oral surgery

after his dearest friend
was mangled in a crash.

H.R.

survived a stroke but lived
a posthumous existence to the end.

And there was Frank the catcher.

Built like a heavyweight, he stood
akimbo when he spoke, flexing
his jaw as if each word
were like a throw to second.

First-string at twenty on the college
varsity, he'd been approached
by scouts and was inclined.

Struck later in the jaw
by a ball thrown wild and hard,
he changed.

Thirty pounds
lighter with a wired jawbone
and six teeth lost, he seemed
uncertain to the point of deference.

The list has no amen.

To trump
the odds, discretion matters less
than valor, which matters less
than zero where absurdity's concerned.

The ultimate defense is luck.

The ultimate reprieve is luck.