

To a Bicyclist in France

You mail me postcards stamped in Paris-
Notre Dame *illuminée*, the ferried Seine,
the usual best-foot-forward city scenes.
Saying you miss the States, your words are pure

civilian now- all rank and rancor buried
with the notes you typed from BOQs another
breed ago. You left the generals
their Jeeps and crew-cuts for a biker's tour

of Europe on your saved-up pay, and shunned
the niche your father wanted you to fit..
The ex-lieutenant in me wakes and shakes
me ten years back. I could have biked from Caen,

have cashed my bonds and severance for fare
and pedaled humming through Montmartre, Versailles,
Provence and downward to Marseilles, but I
had someone else to be and somewhere next

to go with something there to do. My past
leaves Europe still mere names to me. At times
I have regrets- re-plot alternatives
I could have lived- pronounce my lived years lost....

Yet I can write without a hint of cant
I ride with you across the fact of France

as fast as I can think since thinking takes
me where I am despite these accidents

of place. Paris by night and Pittsburgh hills
are similarly still at 4:00 a.m.

Stillness is stillness, life is life, and earth
remains the earth with days quite short, and nights

shorter, and trips the shortest prank of chance.

Apart, we breathe this day alike and stand
an equal distance from eternity--

you there in the U.S.A., me here in France.

For George James