

To a Commencement of Scoundrels

My boys, we lied to you.

The world by definition stinks
of Cain, no matter what
your teachers told you. Heroes
and the fools of God may rise
like accidental green
on gray saharas, but the sand
stays smotheringly near.

Deny me if you can. Already
you are turning into personnel,
manpower, figures on a list
of earners, voters, prayers,
soldiers, payers, sums
of population tamed with forms:
last name, middle name, first name—
telephone—date of birth—

home address—age—hobbies—
experience. Tell them the truth.

Your name is Legion. You
are aged a million. Tell
them that. Say you breathe
between appointments: first day,
last day. The rest is no

one's business. Boys, the time

is prime for prophecy.

Books break down their bookends.

Paintings burst their frames.

The world is more than reason's

peanut. Homer sang it real.

Goya painted it, and Shakespeare

staged it for the pelting rinds

of every groundling of the Globe.

Wake up! Tonight the lions

hunt in Kenya. They

can eat a man. Rockets

are spearing through the sky.

They can blast a man to nothing.

Rumors prowl like rebellions.

They can knife a man. No one

survives for long, my boys.

Flesh is always in season,

lusted after, gunned, grenaded,

tabulated through machines,

incinerated, beaten to applause,

anesthetized, autopsied, mourned.

The blood of Troy beats on

in Goya's painting and the truce

of Lear. Reason yourselves

to that, my buckaroos,
before you rage for God,
country, and siss-boom-bah!

You won't, of course. Your schooling
left you trained to serve
like cocksure Paul before
God's lightning smashed
him from his saddle. So—

I wish you what I wish
myself: hard questions
and the nights to answer them,
the grace of disappointment,
and the right to seem the fool
for justice. That's enough.
Cowards might ask for more.
Heroes have died for less.