

WHAT DON'T I ASK, WHAT DON'T I TELL

Gettysburg, PA —

families crowd the run-down visitor's
center — school groups cloud
dim glass around guns — the tour guide ponders
my question confused
perhaps at the thought of a she-poet
buried but feet from the fallen soldiers
perhaps at our interest in her — we
do not know the names
of his soldiers — he
does not know the work
of nor the name Ms.
Marianne Moore —

so we put aside Ms.

Moore decide the self-guided auto-tour
will cure our boredom
justify the drive — placards match numbers
on the map plastic
protecting a script I read silently
you read out loud intent on how photo
reproductions match, recreate landscape —
it was not until
our hike up Big Round
Top — tulip trees full
their fallen blossoms
yellow-green, flower

circumscribed with orange —

that I understood — two black butterflies
circled encircled
each wing each grave — O copse, highwater mark
of a divided
nation — O blue fishhook inside gray, side
broke against side, the bodies flayed, corpses
corpses — and now almost a century
and a half later
what hangs on those fields —
silence — silence — say
the word write silence
until it sounds looks

wrong — silence as deep
or deeper than the park's requested peace —
it could not can not
consecrate like the consecration made
those July days — no
cemetery designated private
or public holds the living's thoughts at bay —
take this soldier who weeps a man nursing
a man, man's last words
to another, two
men ambiguous
as daguerreotypes
that portray two men

no context or sign
of relationship, the action at hand —
here one man dies while
his comrade survives — features fade and merge
memory fails me
transforms memorial, idealizes
the texture of a beard the expression
exchanged eyes locked on the eyes of the one
who dies spark of life
lost no words no words —
lost like the failed points
of light as they flexed
across field and ridge

the Cyclorama
map's topography a palm's contours lost
like that blood-flecked tooth
I cradled at age seven crown and roots
nestled in my life
line's crease — I tasted iron as my tongue
tip touched socket, shot back like a palm bit
from a metal nip found beneath the pillow —
vigil — keep vigil
bronze soldier vigil
over your comrade
dying beneath you —
no retreat — no peace —

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