

## **Ballad of the One-Legged Marine**

*For Ray Fagan*

My left leg was gone with the boot still on—  
the boot that I laced in the morning.

I felt like a boy who had stepped on a toy  
and made it explode without warning.

They choppered me back to a medical shack  
with no one but corpsmen to heed me.

I stared at the sky and prayed I would die,  
and cursed when the nurse came to feed me.

I knew that I must, so I tried to adjust  
while orderlies struggled to teach me  
the will of the crutch and the skill of the cane  
and assured me their methods would reach me.

The President came with his generals tame  
and explained why he never relieved us.  
But the red, white and blue of my lone, right shoe  
told the world how he lied and deceived us.

They buried my shin and my bones and my skin  
an ocean away from this writing.  
But pain finds a way on each given day  
to take me straight back to the fighting

when I served with the Corps in a slaughterhouse war  
where we tallied our killings like cattle  
as if these explain why the armies of Cain  
behave as they do in a battle...

Whatever's a bore, you can learn to ignore,  
but a leg's not a limb you like leaving.  
So you deal with regret and attempt to forget  
what always is there for the grieving.

If you look for a clue while I stand in a queue,  
you can't tell what's real from prosthetic.  
I walk with a dip that begins at my hip,  
but I keep it discreet and aesthetic.

If you're ordered on line and step on a mine,  
you learn what it means to be only  
a name on a chart with a hook in your heart  
and a life that turns suddenly lonely.

Lose arms, and you're left incomplete and bereft.  
Lose legs, and you're fit for a litter.  
Lose one at the knee, and you're just like me  
with night after night to be bitter.