

*Auto Wreck*

By: Karl Shapiro

Its quick soft silver bell beating, beating,  
And down the dark one ruby flare  
Pulsing out red light like an artery,  
The ambulance at top speed floating down  
Past beacons and illuminated clocks  
Wings in a heavy curve, dips down,  
And brakes speed, entering the crowd.  
The doors leap open, emptying light;  
Stretchers are laid out, the mangled lifted  
And stowed into the little hospital.  
Then the bell, breaking the hush, tolls once,  
And the ambulance with its terrible cargo  
Rocking, slightly rocking, moves away,  
As the doors, an afterthought, are closed.

We are deranged, walking among the cops  
Who sweep glass and are large and composed.  
One is still making notes under the light.  
One with a bucket douches ponds of blood  
Into the street and gutter.  
One hangs lanterns on the wrecks that cling,  
Empty husks of locusts, to iron poles.

Our throats were tight as tourniquets,  
Our feet were bound with splints, but now,  
Like convalescents intimate and gauche,  
We speak through sickly smiles and warn  
With the stubborn saw of common sense.  
The grim joke and the banal resolution.  
The traffic moves around with care,  
But we remain touching a wound,  
That opens to our richest horror  
Already old, the question Who shall die?

Becomes unspoken Who is innocent?  
For death in war is done by hands:  
Suicide has cause and stillbirth, logic;  
And cancer, simple as a flower, blooms.  
But this invites the occult mind,  
Cancels our physics with a sneer.  
And spatters all we knew of denouncement  
Across the expedient and wicked stones.