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**“To a Friend Dying of Cancer in a War Zone,” “Spring Offensive,”  
“Paramilitary,” “The Secret of Stealth,” and “Summit Summary”  
(poems)**

John Gery  
*University of New Orleans, jgery@uno.edu*

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*John Gery*

To a Friend Dying of Cancer in a War Zone

*Fatigue*—a word in English meaning more than *tired* or *exhausted*. Last summer your impassioned heart, Drago, your energy, unsettled me like sudden electricity, a jolt of love ten times the strength of men. Tonight I'm searching for that love again.

**29 March 1999**

## Spring Offensive

*So little cause for carolings....*

—*Thomas Hardy*

The birds keep singing in the dark  
as undeterred as Englishmen  
in Africa; my neighbors quiet—  
sound asleep—I lie here stark  
and fast, near the millennium,

bewildered and as unconsoled  
by all the things I thought I knew  
as empires by their allies. Still,  
this music fills my room, unspoiled  
as though it were the one thing true  
my country hasn't tried to kill

or bind into its vast regime.  
If I, too, could only sing, instead  
of tossing dumbly through the night—  
anxious to exorcize this dream  
and rest in peace in my own bed—  
I might not dread the morning light,

dread finding out what new assault  
was launched in darkness from the sky  
against whomever's next in line  
to be disposed of. So who's at fault,  
then, these exalting birds, or I?  
Cowering in my own design

of arrogance, hung on the air,  
I'm stuck, the victim of their song  
(whether propaganda or prayer)  
insisting nothing can go wrong,  
and nothing I do can defy it.

## “Paramilitary”

Is it like a faked orgasm,  
adopting the same rigor,  
the same artificial ecstasy

of that kind of power,  
with its “clearly defined  
objective”—rushing

alongside the rest of us, we  
who plod on, night after  
night, week in, week

out, wedding ourselves to  
a state we call, for lack  
of anything better, “identity”—

a private, separate force  
that says, *I know what I need.*  
*And I want nobody else*

*telling me when to put  
forward, what rules to play by.  
From an instinct no one*

*learns at school, how easily  
I come to claim my prize,  
pushing around whomever*

*I please. And who dares not  
believe I'm real? For the sheer  
hell of it, I sound out the part*

*more than the part itself, a  
flash of a fantasy, a limit  
others can only aspire to, lying*

*to prove there's nothing  
to mastering this or any art  
but to sweat it out on your own.*

## The Secret of Stealth

for Adam Puslojic

What I don't understand somehow  
 about the obscene pun on "Big Mac"  
 we saw scribbled across the U.S.  
 Embassy wall in Belgrade—*Vi imate*  
*mek, a mi tvrd*—something to do with  
 the flaccid penis Serbs think of as  
 America, applies, too, to those bombers  
 tooling invisibly through an empty sky,  
 those black hawks we praise as heroic  
 in their removal. It's like the guy  
 who charms the pants off the ladies  
 but never pulls his own zipper down:  
 Who are we fooling by sending them?

We are not at war with a faceless enemy  
 down there, hacking children apart  
 cool as you please, caught red-handed  
 in our blue sights, digitally targeted,  
 but with ourselves, too moot to die  
 readily anymore for anything  
 or anyone. Imagine the tiny cell  
 we want to impregnate everyone  
 everywhere with. Imagine getting  
 trapped there ourselves, tucked snugly  
 inside, as though locked in the cargo bay  
 on a slave ship. Imagine hard love (*tvrd!*)  
 within that tight berth. It's no wonder

our bombardiers can't wait to get home.  
 Traveling concealed, even in the dark,  
 has its liabilities. But to be hidden  
 in America is to be stolid and manly  
 as apple pie, the one jammed in the pantry  
 between the beets and lard. No weapon  
 in your hands, or cradled on your lap,  
 is ever quite so big as when, unseen  
 on its rack, untouched beneath your stiff,  
 shiny belly, it promises to spread its duster  
 of appleseeds, driven like pure snow  
 onto those flailing below, the same ones  
 otherwise sure to ruin your best laid plans.

## Summit Summary

Tactfully irrelevant as the strategic plan tucked in the vest pocket of the colonel, third from left, beside the female translator in this wire photo of the president's parlor equipped with Queen Anne couches and tables during his meeting with foreign ministers newly arrived from the north and west by special convoy, under the protection of arms, to discuss the latest peace proposal both sides with the predictability of a boomerang will later reject, I continue my work here as, if not Melville's sub-sub-librarian overflowing with scholarly ambition but utterly forgotten behind his moldy stacks, a poet a little less academic than an argument on the relative market value in autumn of the butterwort between two carpenters assessing the property of a modest house whose blueprint has yet to be drawn up on a tract near the town center next to the bank about to implode under pressure from the mistargeted bomb now en route aboard the previously programmed missile launched, as it turns out, just before these same well-dressed dignitaries in this photo completed their lunch of beefsteak and peppers.

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**John Gery** has two new books forthcoming, *Davenport's Version* (Portals Press, 2002), a narrative poem set in Civil War New Orleans, and *A Gallery of Ghosts* (Story Line, 2003), a collection of poems. The recipient of a 2002 Artist Fellowship from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, he is Research Professor of English at the University of New Orleans and Director of the Ezra Pound Center for Literature, Brunnenburg Castle, Italy.