

Jennifer Maiden

DODGE: from *Three Gulf War Poems*

("They were just trying to get the hell out of Dodge" —
U.S. soldier, looking at the dead on the Basra Road.)

The strongest thing
in this has always been
repatriation, been
the right to go home again,
beyond
the right to truth or breath.

This
supercedes the image
of a bird in oil
and is not
about guns or gold,
no longer even
about fiery pride,
or long
plotting, long
resentment
bursting out at last in death.

Most of these, out West,
were the crowd at the gunfight
who watched from
the windows, or carried
their rifles barrel-down,
 unless
the deputy was there,
 and then
would echo his distress,
 always
a little unpredictable,
nervous, and a little
unsure about the facts.

It would be wrong,
though, to patronise
what is framed here
and dignified —
a corpse-hand, half-curved, and half
childlike,
 half black, or one
frail stranger sprawled face-down,
 his leg
tucked out for walking back.