

## Inventory

That I am white must be understood  
in context of west Euro ancestry, rather  
than east or north Euro, regardless  
how much I've admired  
nordic expressions of maleness,  
brutal and hopeless at once;  
and further in context of west Euro  
celtic, of Ireland's farthest west coast  
parishes nearby Dingle Bay; it must be  
understood my people were Catholic,  
raised South, and came from men  
of resistance, unlike other backboneless  
bastards who'd turn off and give up, or so  
goes that history, sketched out for me in America,  
first generation born here, 9<sup>th</sup> first son  
in a line of first sons that goes back  
so far as we track to the 1780's –  
and even if that's true and important,  
it's now what's American makes me a man, not  
like those in this line were men; I'm less  
absolute in aspects of Warrior I'd guess,  
given that standing for hearth and home demands  
foreign ways to engage and counter-  
attack – not that I'm saying I'm less  
a man, or that this northeast geography's  
mule-dragged winters and sharp, short summers  
buffered by weeks of clear twilights and dawns  
is not an equivalent test of what it means

to be resolute, sometimes just brutal  
making a life of work, of rest, of help to those  
people not able, for reasons, to hack out  
a heritage from what they can find -- help  
which sometimes I think feels a little too easily  
given -- it's hard everywhere for us all;  
I can't help but think they cannot be trying  
enough, that maybe I or we should really  
get in there and teach them about fighting a way out  
a way up -- not that I think  
goddamned rich bastards, spending  
days making up ways to twist tighter,  
watering their lilies and lawns with  
what they squeeze out of us -- not that I think  
anything they know is anything I'd want to count --  
But I've worked to level these playing fields  
until it settled in me, one day taking stock,  
that such fertile fields never existed, that what's  
level may not be what's best, what's fair  
struck me suddenly as being no good  
contribution to how things evolve since  
how could we all of us possibly win, or what if,  
in fairness, in pulling up this or that group of lives  
some others emerging are crushed -- how can I or we  
know which are the right ones to count? -- and that sends me  
back to my walls, my four walls, the four walls  
each of us gets, and each of us frets over  
whether they're just thick enough to hold back  
all that we've listed to fear, but yet just  
thin enough to let some sort of reason seep in,  
reason that wouldn't demand I let go  
such middling things as I have --

lightly missed though they would be -- my walls  
behind which I count, within which I weigh,  
measure these things that surround me against  
those of my own kind, and then against those not  
my kind -- and in so taking stock of my life  
I hear a vague call again, seeking response,  
makes me pull everything close that I have,  
lock it all down, and know in my white bones  
that I and we all must come clean, answer this call:  
we are racist, sexist, classist – repeat:  
homophobic, geocentric, fanatic – repeat: until  
every last one of us drawing breath now  
gets that we cannot be part of the fix  
that tears off the plates of this armor  
we never think anyone sees, until  
we give up that we wear it,  
and count it, once and for all.

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*From Inventories, 2012*