Called

The task of leading begins from within. It begins with a dream, a sense of what's possible, a commitment to a cause, a yearning to solve a problem, or a restless need to express one's creativity in service of the world. Vaclav Havel—the poet and playwright who lifted a movement for freedom with the audacity of his words and the steadiness of his heart—reminds us that the inward turn is not self-absorption but is critical to our effectiveness in the real world. In a speech to the U.S. Congress, Havel urged these leaders to take on the needs of the world, not through manipulation of external forces or political maneuvers but through engaging the human heart. "Salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart—in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and human responsibility." Leadership begins from within. Power justly and humanely unleashed must work from the inside out.

The contributors in this section describe how they came to hear and understand their calling. We hear of mentors and role models who counsel, inspire, and provoke. The contributors describe "threads that are followed"; they speak of "jumping into work head first," of circuitous vocational journeys that, as one poet tells us, result in the "end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started."

The theme of this section is the search for "work that is real" and the unrelenting effort to be self-conscious and attentive to one's own heart.

My parents loved poetry, and my ten brothers and sisters and I took turns memorizing poems for recitation at the dinner table. We favored the ballad poems. Tennyson, Kipling, and Robert Service were standard favorites. Most of my siblings can still flawlessly recite "The Cremation of Sam McGee," "Gunga Din," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "Abdul Abulbul Amir," and "Casey at the Bat."

But my father's favorite poem and one we all memorized was Tennyson's "Ulysses." This is the story of Ulysses, in his dotage, rallying his friends for a last heroic journey. My father's last book, *To Seek a Newer World,* took its title from a line in the poem.

—Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. serves as senior attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, chief prosecuting attorney for the Hudson Riverkeeper, and president of Waterkeeper Alliance. He was named one of *Time* magazine's Heroes for the Planet for his success helping Riverkeeper lead the fight to restore the Hudson River.

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,—cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,—
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved

From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
    This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me,—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads,—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep

Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends.
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

—Alfred Lord Tennyson

I spent my summer teaching preschool and kindergarten in Tema, Ghana, through a program called Global Volunteers Organization. On the day that I arrived in Tema, my host mother brought me to the classroom where I would be teaching. After introducing me to the students, she indicated that I could begin to teach. I was jetlagged and hungry, but I dove in headfirst.

Education in Ghana is privatized; only children whose parents can afford the fees get to attend. Yet the quality of the education is still quite poor. The school I taught in was in desperate need of staff, and there were no teaching materials other than chalk and a blackboard. Still, I had to teach French, English, religion, art, math, and physical education. I found myself constantly running from one thing to the next. Lunches had to be cooked over an open fire and served, sick children had to be nursed, homework had to be written, issued, and corrected. Each day I struggled, feeling as though I wasn't making an impact.

Ultimately, I just had to get up each morning and offer the kids my best. This poem sustained me during that summer when I was feeling so doubtful. It sustains me still. When I become pessimistic about the situation in Ghana, I fall back on hope. I have to hope that there will be something better for these children eventually. I have to hope that things can change. I have to hope that my own talents can make a small difference.

—Nicole Gagnon

Nicole Gagnon is a senior at Smith College, majoring in education and child study and African studies. She has studied and taught in East and West Africa and plans to return to Africa for a career in disaster relief.

From "'Hope' is the thing with feathers"

"Hope" is the thing with feathers–
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops–at all–

—*Emily Dickinson*

The journey to becoming a wise and effective leader begins with the work of understanding oneself. My journey began with a grandmother who scrubbed floors for a wealthy white family but had a vision that laid the groundwork for her grandson to have an Ivy League undergraduate and graduate education. She was so intrepid as to have a big dream (read: American) and to work hard enough to bring that dream to fruition for her children and their children.

As a black American, I feel an obligation to honor the fact that, despite our troubled racial history and the persistent presence of racism in too many aspects of our national life, the realization of my grandmother's dream happened here in America—nowhere else. This dream was buoyed through the generations by hope. I believe the ability of blacks to cling to a conception of what it means to be "American" that honors and celebrates our democratic principles while pushing to reconcile the enduring contradictions moves us ever closer to the ideal. As leaders we need to model, as best we can, what a life (professional and personal) lived with hope looks like. I love Alberta K.'s pride and the audacity that she has to appropriate the appellation "American" and boldly claim it as her own. Alberta K. embraces the difficulties of black folks' American past, because she knows it is the only way to seize the possibilities of our American future. I left Wall Street to become an educator because it strikes me that this is a worthwhile belief to share with our children.

—Kyle Dodson

Kyle Dodson is the principal of the Lee Academy Pilot School in Dorchester, Massachusetts. He was a member of the inaugural cohort of the Boston Principal Fellows Program, a one-year intensive program to train new leaders for the Boston Public Schools. Prior to his career in education, he was a mortgage-backed securities trader at PaineWebber, Inc.

Madam's Calling Card

I had some cards printed
The other day.
They cost me more
Than I wanted to pay.

I told the man
I wasn't no mint,
But I hankered to see
My name in print.

MADAM JOHNSON,
ALBERTA K.
He said, Your name looks good
Madam'd that way.

Shall I use Old English
Or a Roman letter?
I said, Use American.
American's better.

There's nothing foreign
To my pedigree:
Alberta K. Johnson—
American that's me.

—*Langston Hughes*

It's hard to say when it took root. It could have been when I was a kid tucked into a tent on our family's camping trips. Or it could have been its absence, growing up in New York City. In any case, my connection to the outdoors and nature had become an integral part of who I was before I left high school. By the time I graduated from college, I was leading mountaineering treks, sharing my passion for the natural world, and marveling at how it changed and humbled everyone.

In 1993, after months leading trips in the back country, I left the mountains. Ten hours later I was walking across the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The abrupt transformation of my surroundings crystallized my understanding that, although the wilderness seems endless when you are creeping up the side of a mountain with an eighty-five-pound pack on your back, the truth is that these places are small, fragile, and shrinking fast; saving them from our encroaching civilization is going to require a different kind of environmentalist.

Today, I am still following that thread through board rooms and trading floors in New York, Beijing, and Tokyo. I structure transactions that finance global greenhouse gas abatement projects. Environmental markets are a bare-knuckled way of keeping the cost of actions squarely in the calculus of investors, companies, and governments. Bumper stickers and recycling programs matter, but if we're serious about preserving this planet, we need to develop financial incentives for reducing pollution. "You don't ever let go of the thread."

—Michael Intrator

Michael Intrator is managing director of Natsource Asset Management, LLC, and responsible for trading environmental commodities, including EU Allowances and renewable energy. He executes transactions for certified emission reductions created by Clean Development Mechanism projects.

The Way It Is

There's a thread that you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

—*William Stafford*

My shelves for years have held books my grandfather gave me—books about the Spanish Civil War (Orwell, Alvah, Bessie), about the Rosenbergs (he'd supported their defense and tried to help their orphaned sons), about religion (mostly against it), and philosophy (generally in favor but more Marx than Plato).

On a visit two years ago, when I asked how he was feeling, sitting almost immobile in a soft chair angled toward the window in his Florida sitting room, he talked about Milton's *Paradise Lost*. "In that book, the devil says a man's mind can make a heaven out of hell, or a hell out of heaven," he said. "So you ask me, how am I doing? In my body, I'm in hell, but with my mind, I'm trying to live in heaven."

The long poem by William Carlos Williams, "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," includes these famous lines:

> It is difficult
> to get the news from poems
> yet men die miserably every day
> for lack
> of what is found there.

I think my grandfather got that news and died with some notions of heaven—though he did not believe in heaven—in mind.

—Peter S. Temes

Peter S. Temes is founder and president of the ILO Institute, a think tank for corporations on the practice of innovation. He was president of the Great Books Foundation and the Antioch New England Graduate School. He teaches part-time at Columbia University and is the author of *The Just War* and *The Power of Purpose*.

From "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower"

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,
    like a buttercup
        upon its branching stem–
save that it's green and wooden–
    I come, my sweet,
        to sing to you.
We lived long together
    a life filled,
        if you will,
with flowers. So that
    I was cheered
        when I came first to know
that there were flowers also
    in hell. . . .
It is difficult
to get the news from poems
    yet men die miserably every day
        for lack
of what is found there.

—*William Carlos Williams*

I was the first in my family to go to college. On my first day, my mother held me in a warm embrace, looked me in the eye and said, "With this education you will be able to do anything you want to do. But be sure you are passionate about what you choose to do; do the work that is in your heart."

My quest to do work I loved and valued led me to create ChildrenFirst—a business providing parents with high-quality child care when their regular care arrangements were not available. I hoped, by holding a high standard for children's care, ChildrenFirst could be a vehicle for social change. In the work of nurturing and keeping children safe, good is not enough; only excellence should be accepted.

As ChildrenFirst expanded nationally, we served over fifty thousand children and two hundred corporations. The cornerstone of our success was our magnificent teachers. Heeding my mother's advice, we created a workplace where teachers could work in a way that "touched their soul." We wanted every teacher to be nurtured, honored, and developed to their fullest potential, not as employees but as human beings. In turn, our teachers were able to fully bring themselves to the children and families we served.

Just as my mother's hope, faith, and love enabled me to pursue the work of my heart, leaders must inspire others to feel a part of the mission of the work. It is then that we can accomplish what we cannot do alone.

—Rosemary Jordano Shore

Rosemary Jordano Shore is the founder and former chairman and CEO of ChildrenFirst Inc.—the nation's largest corporate backup child care company. She was selected as The American Women's Economic Development Corporation's 2003 Entrepreneur of the Year. Shore serves on the national board for the Center for Courage & Renewal.

From *The Irony of American History*

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime;
therefore, we must be saved by hope.
Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense
in any immediate context of history;
therefore, we must be saved by faith.
Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone;
therefore we are saved by love.

—*Reinhold Niebuhr*

How happy children are when we allow them to be creative—to laugh and to run freely as they wish. Do this and we are sure to see children who feel as if they are floating "on a cloud." This poem might well be a road map for floating. I sometimes wonder if I molded my career after the simple teachings of this poem.

As the head state coach for Massachusetts Youth Soccer, I help oversee 30,000 coaches working with over 200,000 children. My task is to teach coaches to see the game through the eyes of a child—each individual child. As coaches, we must realize and embrace the important role we have in children's lives. It is a role that carries much responsibility and transcends a simple game. We coach self-esteem, creativity, social skills, leadership, discipline, sportsmanship, coordination, and teamwork while promoting intrinsic motivation. As a teacher of coaches, I yearn for my coaches to personally connect with each child and find delight in the role.

In this poem, the piper turns himself into a singer and then to a writer. One could read this as being about limited attention spans or ephemeral taste; a second read suggests that Blake understood that we must always be experimenting with new ideas and playing with new methods as a teacher, a leader, and a coach. This poem reminds me to keep piping, singing, or writing, or doing whatever I need to do to make more children happy and to teach others to do the same.

—Michael Singleton

Michael Singleton is the head state coach and director of coaching for Massachusetts Youth Soccer. He also serves on the U.S. Youth Soccer's National Coaching Staff.

From *Songs of Innocence*

Introduction

Piping down the valleys wild,
    Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
    And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a lamb!"
    So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper, pipe that song again;"
    So I piped: he wept to hear.

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe;
    Sing thy songs of happy cheer!"
So I sung the same again,
    While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
    In a book that all may read."
So he vanished from my sight;
    And I plucked a hollow reed,

And I made a rural pen,
    And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
    Every child may joy to hear.

—*William Blake*

I am the daughter of a country physician and nurse team. Growing up, the view from my front porch was of a large dairy farm and rolling meadows. This immediate and constant connection to nature and the ever-present life-and-death events in the home-based medical practice helped ground me in what really matters in life. My parents rejected materialism and commercial definitions of happiness. My father insisted on driving an old beat-up Ford, and my mother darned socks and taught us to put away food for the winter from our garden. At an early age, I came to understand the fragility and preciousness of life.

As my parents' daughter, I work with others to challenge the "more is always better" definition of the American dream. It's been an uphill struggle. Vehicles, houses, and malls have gotten bigger, while farmland, clean water, and human satisfaction have diminished. There is a connection between the slopes of these statistics. How do we pull away from excessive consumerism and reclaim more authentic sources of meaning?

Snyder's poem roots me in the answers to this question. We must stay connected to the flowers and unplug from technology. We need to reach across the ethnic and ideological barriers that divide us and stay together. And we must "go light."

There is a way forward, but it takes work. There are no advertisements that remind us to pick berries, have regular picnics in quiet places, or hang a clothesline. But this poem points the way.

—Betsy Taylor

Betsy Taylor is founder and board member of the Center for a New American Dream. She edited and coauthored *Sustainable Planet: Solutions for the Twenty-First Century* and authored *What Kids Really Want That Money Can't Buy.* She advises philanthropists and organizational leaders on strategies to promote a more equitable and sustainable society.

For the Children

The rising hills, the slopes,
of statistics
lie before us.
the steep climb
of everything, going up,
up, as we all
go down.

In the next century
or the one beyond that,
they say,
are valleys, pastures,
we can meet there in peace
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests
one word to you, to
you and your children:

stay together
learn the flowers
go light

—*Gary Snyder*

When I left my first vocation as a college English teacher for a second as a pastor, my department chair pronounced on me a kind of ordination: "I guess you've worked in one form of higher education here, and now you're moving on to another. Here you're helping people not flunk out of school, and there you'll help them avoid flunking out of life."

I spent over twenty years as a pastor. I found the pastorate to be an ongoing conspiracy of resurrection. Roethke's beautiful poem came back to me often as I walked with people through the joys and struggles of life.

Now I find myself launching out on a third vocation—yet another form of higher education—as a writer-speaker-activist. Through books and conferences instead of sermons and services, I strive to bring the wrestling hope contained in Roethke's poem to people who—wounded, alienated, or disillusioned—are about to lose faith or have not yet found it.

For societies as for individuals, it is the struggle and strain of hope that brings about saintliness. Roethke's poem, linking the language-beyond-speech of spirit with the primal, wordless vigor of botany, encourages me to keep calling forth resurrection in everyone I teach and lead, always hoping against hope that they—and we—can rise. As a more vigorous hope rises in more of us, and as we come together in hopeful action, new possibilities can emerge between the "tight grains" of our world, and a better future can "put down feet."

—Brian D. McLaren

Brian D. McLaren (brianmclaren.net) served for twenty-four years as the founding pastor of an innovative church near Washington, D.C. Now he is an author and speaker and is on several boards, including Sojourners/Call to Renewal and Emergent Village. In 2005, *Time* magazine named McLaren as one of "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America."

Cuttings

later

This urge, wrestle, resurrection of dry sticks,
Cut stems struggling to put down feet,
What saint strained so much,
Rose on such lopped limbs to a new life?

I can hear, underground, that sucking and
    sobbing,
In my veins, in my bones I feel it,—
The small waters seeping upward,
The tight grains parting at last.
When sprouts break out,
Slippery as fish,
I quail, lean to beginnings, sheath-wet.

—*Theodore Roethke*

What becomes of the hearts and spirits of children growing up in the midst of war and violence? How can I help? This has been my quest.

I started my journey in the Deheisha refugee camp in the occupied Palestinian territories. There I met five-year-old Nur, whose father had been killed when a bullet came through a window while the family ate dinner. I traveled to Mozambique and met Thomas, whose legs were blown off when he stepped on a landmine. I traveled to Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Cambodia, and Angola, searching for answers. I learned that while children do suffer, many children marshal their resilience, fostered by caring adults, to become agents of healing and social change.

When I returned home, I was drawn to the Robert Taylor Homes housing project in Chicago, one of the largest, poorest, and most violent communities in the United States—a place where children are caught in the crossfire of gang shootouts and are not certain they will live to finish elementary school. Robert Taylor Homes—a place I feared—was a mile and a half from where I lived. But after exploring and learning on distant continents, I knew the children in this urban war zone had seeds of resilience that needed to be nurtured by caring adults.

The children—from distant lands and here at home—continue to teach me much about the human spirit—about love, forgiveness, and resilience—and what we can and must do to protect and nurture these precious resources.

—Kathleen Kostelny

Kathleen Kostelny is an international psychosocial consultant on children affected by war and violence. For two decades she has worked on behalf of children in war zones, including Afghanistan, East Timor, Sri Lanka, and Sierra Leone. She also works with children in the United States living with chronic community violence.

From *Little Gidding*

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

—*T. S. Eliot*

My father's highest accolade, the one that made our hearts sing, was, "You do good work." My parents modeled what it meant to "jump into the work head first"—through their approach to life which included their work as activists in Mississippi's civil rights movement.

The same spirit motivated my sister Christina, my best friend, my mirror image. Her passion for justice filled up the world. She died when she was thirty-three, and a friend fittingly read "To Be of Use" at her funeral. I have lived my life partly for her ever since.

The work still "has to be done, again and again" even more so after Hurricane Katrina brought into sharper relief the persistent problems of poverty and racial injustice. While exposing our unfinished business, it also generated a huge outpouring of offers of help. As president of the Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ), I realized our job was to say yes to the offers from lawyers and law students who hungered to be of use.

Our historic precedent is Freedom Summer 1964, when a thousand volunteers came to support the heroic, homegrown movement that ended one hundred years of post-slavery apartheid. On the Gulf Coast today, with MCJ's help, dozens of lawyers and hundreds of law students are submerging in the tasks at hand, alongside the inspiring local leaders who picked themselves up out of the rubble of their homes and workplaces. Together, we are honoring our deep, collective desire to do good work and build a more equitable future.

—Martha Bergmark

Martha Bergmark has worked as a civil rights and antipoverty lawyer in Mississippi and as a national advocate for equal justice in Washington, D.C. She is president of the Mississippi Center for Justice, a nonprofit public interest law firm committed to advancing racial and economic justice.

To be of use

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

—*Marge Piercy*

On August 17, 1968, Senator Eugene McCarthy walked out of a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing after the undersecretary of state declared that Congress was "compelled" to support President Johnson's Vietnam policy. McCarthy was heard to say: "This is the wildest testimony I have ever heard. There is no limit to what he says the president can do. There is only one thing to do—take it to the country." And that is what he did.

I was twenty years old and joined thousands of Americans, young and old, marching from New Hampshire to Wisconsin, Indiana, Oregon, California, and New York, culminating in the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. It was six months of the purest experience of democratic grassroots politics-in-action that this country had ever seen and has not experienced since.

Eugene J. McCarthy was my uncle—my father's brother—a man who integrated poetry, philosophy, and political life. His thinking was complex, but his way was practical. In his poetry, his life, and his leadership, he called us to the responsibility of action—to offer our one and only life in service to what we love.

His call to action has influenced my life's work producing documentaries and films. Each film profiles the life and work of a remarkable person who knows that one person can make a difference and that when that person's vision is taken "to the country" it can inspire the lives of thousands.

—Mary Beth Yarrow

Mary Beth Yarrow has been producing documentaries and television films since 1979, including *The Willmar 8* (PBS/TV); *Intimate Portraits: Vanessa Redgrave, Liz Tilberis, and Bella Abzug* (Lifetime Channel); *Sidney Poitier "One Bright Light"* (American Masters Series for WNET-PBS/TV & BBC2); and *Sean O'Casey: Under a Coloured Cap* (RTE, BBC/Northern Ireland & BBC4).

Ares

god, Ares
is not dead.
he lives,
where blood and water mix
in tropic rains.
no, NNE, or S
or W, no compass—
only mad roosters
tail down on twisted vanes
point to the wind
of the falling sky
the helicopter wind
that blows straight down
flattening the elephant grass
to show small bodies crawling
at the roots, or dead
and larger ones
in the edged shade, to be counted
for the pentagon, and
for the New York Times.

ideologies can make a war
last long and go far
ideologies do not have boundaries
cannot be shown on maps
before and after
or even on a globe
as meridian, parallel
or papal line of demarcation.

what is the line between
Moslem and Jew
Christian and Infidel
Catholic and Huguenot
with St. Bartholomew waiting
on the calendar for his day
to come and go?
what map can choose between cropped
heads
and hairy ones?
what globe affirm
"better dead than red"
"better red than dead"
ideologies do not bleed
they only blood the world.

mathematical wars go farther.
they run on ratios
of kill and over-kill
from one to x
and to infinity.
we are bigger, one to two

we are better, one to three
death is the measure
it's one of us to four
of them, or eight to two
depending on your
point of view.
12 to 3
means victory
12 to 5
forebodes defeat.
these ratios stand
sustained
by haruspex and IBM.
we can kill all you
three times
and you kill all of us
but once and a half—the game
is prisoner's base, and we
are fresh on you
with new technology.

we sleep well
but worry some. We know
that you would kill us twice
if you could, and not leave
that second death half done.
we are unsure
that even three times killed
you might not spring up whole.
snakes close again
and cats do, it is true
have nine lives. Why
not the same for you?
no one knows about third comings
we all wait for the second, which
may be by-passed
in the new arithmetic.
or which, when it comes
may look like a first
and be denied.

the best war, if war must be
is one for Helen
or for Aquitaine.
no computation stands
and all the programmed lights
flash
and burn slowly down to dark
when one man says
I will die
not twice, or three times over
but my one first life, and last
lay down for this my space
my place, my love.

—Eugene McCarthy