Three Poems by Robert Cooperman

Joe DiMaggio, the Next Time Around

Sports writers, teammates, and opponents
thought him aloof as a prince who can't bear
to be sullied by the prattling of lesser men.

In his next life, he'll come back as a cabby
whose mouth goes sixty miles an hour:
even to fares who want to be left alone,
or couples who can't wait for a room,

as Joe, in his first life, couldn't wait
to get at Marilyn, their bed exploding,
until it was obvious she couldn't have children,
or as some said, a botched surgery
rendered him soft as overcooked pasta.

But as a cabby he was loquacious as a barber;
most fares left his taxi a little more cheerful,
especially when he'd serenade them with an aria
or a sentimental Italian song, and if they joined in,
Joe whistled back to the garage at shift's end,
then home: except that one time a fare shouted,

"Shut the hell up, you can't sing for crap!"
Joe trudging home, sighing to his wife,
"What a big mouth I have." She stroked
his sweet face, and advised him not to let,

"That bastard," get him down. "Go kiss
the kids good-night," she nudged him.
"They love to hear the sound of your voice."

Older

We male poets of a certain age
almost always use the line about
being older than our fathers ever got:
part fact, part lament, and part relief
we've made it past a dangerous threshold,
and our lives now stretch before us
like an almost never-ending highway.

Men of our fathers' generation
did die early: at least so it seems to me,
with the exception of my pal
Brian's father, whose wiry frame
carried him well into his nineties;
likewise my buddy Michael's dad.

But far too many succumbed to
hard drinking, to smoking like steel mills,
plus all the stress and terror they carried
from World War II on their powerful,
but breakable shoulders, then having
to provide for families in peacetime.

When the great comedian, Sid Caesar died,
I roared at one of his skits, and there
on the screen was Dad again,
in Caesar's young, rubber-funny face:

how I want to remember my father,
not the tired man of the night
before he died, when we watched
a Knicks game, his joy half-hearted
when the game ended.

Still Lifes: The Denver Art Museum

The implicit subject
is always death and decay,
even if it's just one petal—
in a whole bouquet—

that's starting to droop,
or fall onto the polished table
that supports the vase
in the painting's mortal fable.

And notice the flies
that buzz around the fruit:
as much symbols of death
as the Witches', "eye of newt."

As the graveside prayer
laments, "In the midst of life,
we are in death,"
death so fecund, so free from strife,

and so skeletally sharp,
it turns blossoms bare,
and digs its talons
into the gunshot hare

lying beside the reeled-in trout,
glassy-eyed, no longer sleek,
but slack-jawed and still,
its colors starting to blur and streak.

Still, lovely painted blossoms—
in their vivid, vibrant colors—
do live on and on,
like Keats's Urn's striving lovers.

Robert Cooperman's latest collection is *Just Drive* (Brick Road Poetry Press). His work has appeared previously in *The Homestead Review*, and in T*he Sewanee Review* and *Slant*.