Cousin Sidney

Dull as a bat, said my mother

Of cousin Sidney in 1940 that time he tried

To break the garden swing, jumping on it,

12 shoes- at fifteen the tallest boy

In the class, taller than loping Dan Morgan

When Dan Morgan wore his father’s top hat.

Duller than a bat, said my father

When hero Sidney lied about his age

To claim rough khaki, silly ass;

And soon, somewhere near Dunkirk

Some foreign corner was forever Sidney

Though uncle would not believe it.

Missing not dead please God, please

He said, and never bolted the front door,

Never string taken from the letter box,

Never the hall light off lest his one son

Came home through a night of sleet

Whistling, We’ll meet again.

Aunt crying and raw in the onion air

Of the garden (the unswinging empty swing)

Her words on a stretched leash

While uncle shouted, Bloody Germans,

And on November 11th, two howls of

Silence even after three decades.

Till last year, their last year,

When uncle and aunt also went missing,

Missing alas, so that now strangers

Have bolted their door and cut the string

And no-one at all (the hall so dark)

Waits up for Sidney, silly ass.