

Paul White

Western Pastoral

I really didn't want to go
on another round-up this year,
firing our guns into the air
and herding a river of cattle.
I can hear their guttural lowing
under the crooked moon
as we camp around the fire
in his eyes drinking steam.
The bulls of our hearts go leaping
against the rails of their pens
down the chute for the slaughter.

I tried to tell my father
I am more of a Shepard.
I respond to the bleating
of each last lost one.
I stand on the highest rock
wearing a white tattered robe.
I will not miss one of them
who has gone off alone,
down by the burbling water,
to listen to the music of his soul.
I have a hard time hearing my voice
when I spend time with my father.
His war boots muddy my song.