

Litany

Philip White

*All night, all day, angels
watching over me, my Lord.*

And him slipping off,
letting the door close
on mama's prayer-voice,
striking out over
fencetops, slogging
in cinders where
the tracks go down past
the high school
into the world of
blackened smokestacks
and factories.

Him
stooping among cigarettes,
a shriveled condom,
cutting mock swords
out of elm fronds,
slashing into celandine,
watching the yellow
blood flow.

Him
pitching beer cans
at mourning doves, hiding
among stink blossoms
in the tree of heaven
when the five o'clock
comes bearing his father's
face among the faces
in the windows streaming
home.

And
everywhere, everywhere,
the small sword lashing
out, the eyes lashing out,
and the tiny breath rising
over the burnt stones
and broken glass and grim
weeds of the earth,
say, *I am, I am.*