

## Knockout Poem

Marvin Bell

Let it be noted that President Bush does not attend funerals.  
Nor does Laura Bush bother her “beautiful mind” with the news.  
Well, everyone knows Bush is a liar, so maybe he attends  
funerals secretly. And Laura has the run of the White House,  
so it could be she has seen a little something in passing.  
The American flag has a way of capturing one’s attention.  
It is the favorite flag of the world because it burns. I have to believe  
Bush knows this but isn’t sure whether to order that flags be  
flammable or inflammable. He doesn’t cotton to English. Now,  
I know my old friends, the poets with whom I once hobnobbed,  
are happy to be talking to themselves or making up fictions.  
I consign them to their backyards for they are at peace there.  
I was like them. Even before the appetite for self-promotion  
and glamour overtook our literature, back when books were books,  
I too wrote words about words, which is a specialty so empty  
of humanity that it should have its own academic division,  
the Department of Verbal Residue, with its own journal:  
*Clipped Wings: The Journal of Not Even Trying*. Not to have  
listened when Mother said “No!” in a different way leads to  
this self-absorbed inability to spot the overlaps in what is said,  
what is intended, and what is heard. I can still punch out  
your lights without a ladder, you dig? I like the title “Knockout.”  
Poetry should have punch. It should jab, it should undercut,  
clinch in the corners, and consider in hard times a head butt.  
This deadly politeness, this glamour-puss poetry, these  
dumbed down verses and comic novelty acts thin our soul.  
I myself admit the error of my once wishing to succeed.  
I know that it is as inescapable as the life force. I see now  
that one who is lucky must live long to fully inhabit  
the human condition, and to breathe a sigh of relief knowing  
that one will only continue to live at the expense of others  
a little longer, and it seems therefore vain to say anything.