

William S. Merwin

"human speech is like a cracked
kettle on which we pound out tunes
to make bears dance, when what we
want is to win over the stars"

Flaubert

A MASK FOR JANUS 1952
THE DANCING BEARS 1954
GREEN WITH BEASTS 1956
THE CID / MARIVAUX
THE SONG OF ROLAND
THE DRUNK IN THE FURNACE 1960
THE MOVING TARGET 1963
THE LICE 1967
THE CARRIER OF LADDERS
THE MINER'S PALE CHILDREN

"There is a chill, almost a silence that lines his speech, and a difference about his notation of the world which I take as the final achievement of his vast mutations; it is the welcoming of his destitution among men..." *Richard Howard, ALONE WITH AMERICA*

THE LICE - title is taken from Heraclitus fragment about Homer and the boys riddle:
"What we have caught and killed we left behind, but what has escaped we bring with us."

WHEN THE WAR IS OVER

When the war is over
We will be proud of course the air will be
Good for breathing at last
The water will have been improved the salmon
And the silence of heaven will migrate more perfectly
The dead will think the living are worth it we will know
Who we are
And we will all enlist again

(from THE LICE)

sense of the elliptical, opaque -- voice is distant, lucid, elegant, emblematical -- open punctuation, left hand marginal capitals, right hand margin unpunctuated, enjambments -- colloquial speaking voice, into surrealism -- internal world is not specified, emblems exist in mid air -- intuition versus menace --

*tell me what you see vanishing and I will tell you
what you are to whom I say goodbye*

