

## Soldiers Three in the Big Easy

Suspended during World War II, the Mardi Gras  
Resumes in 1947. Will it be  
Unrecognizable, as we ourselves may be,  
Or so unchanged as to embarrass by its stance:  
Its careful unawareness that a Feast of Fools  
Has just concluded overseas. To reassure,  
Parades are calendared as they have always been.  
On Monday night is Momus, noon on Tuesday Rex,  
And in the evening, champagne saucer in his hand  
Instead of scepter, Comus. In a sleet of beads,  
Infrequent hail of favors (none too new; one notes  
“Made in Japan”) in parsimonious largesse  
The floats press on, cell phones and crowd control unknown.  
Most uniforms one sees, however, are, like ours,  
Not costumes. Navy whites are Argentines in port.  
In chilly March as out of place as halter tops,  
Not that they do not make the statement they intend.  
Before the Boston Club’s festooned reviewing stand  
The Lord of Carnival Misrule will toast his Queen,  
And his parade push forward, pressuring the crowd  
Into the bars and restaurants. “It’s hopeless, Men,”  
Our leader says. “We’ll never find a table free.”  
“Let’s go across the River,” someone says, “Algiers  
Is bound to be less crowded.” So, wise veterans  
Of harbor cities, well aware another side  
Is always there, a parallel reality,  
We take the empty outbound ferry.

We return

Too late for Comus, having learned Algiers gears up  
For Lent in its own way, as we for entering  
Civilian life, the grim costume, the utter drag,  
The forty days of 8 to 5 that never end.  
So many decades on, my channel surfing done,  
Sometimes, at midnight on Fat Tuesday, when the Courts  
Of Rex and Comus meet at Comus Ball--TV  
Is barred--I turn the TV off and think of Time  
As sceptered, saucered god upon a float. A float  
*Papier-mache*, but fully Juggernaut enough  
To grind down all who hope for favors, leap for beads.  
Momus who mocks us, Rex who rules, and Comus, quick  
To toast who wait the ferry with his empty cup.  
The Pfc. who rhumbaed with the Argentine  
Before he punched him out died long ago of drink;  
The Corporal who ripped a passing halter off  
Re-upped and vanished in Korea. I survive,  
Rise early on Ash Wednesday, and do not repent.