

TRUMPET

KWAME DAWES

Before the dance in the dusty yard,
before old issue army boots that smell
like France, worn to the flapping tongue,
cracked sole and lace-less looseness,
have stumped the ground, making
the rhythm that reaches deep into
the art, the throb of music for
drunk ancestors; before his bone
and muscle legs start the last
shuffle and leap of a man who
has collapsed unto his uncertain
madness; before he arrives at this
doorway at the end of a dream,
this doorway leading to the absence
of knowing, of answers; before
he arrives here in the glaring
silence of a Pittsburg July day,
the screaming and concussion
of the 4th now distant, the flies
traveling in droves coloring the world
black; before he understands
the sadness of this fenceless
house where the dead man's

body is laid out on the dining
table, where the widow stands
in elegant black, the bones of her
cheeks sharp as stoic grace, her
face dry, no tears, this shadowed
woman waiting with tall glasses
of cool lemonade; before the son's
return, prodigal and broken, a soldier
who has stared into redness
of exploded bodies; before
this play finds its truest music,
the headlong rush to meaning,
to redemption, for mercy, oh mercy;
before all this, the man with
a plate of metal stitched to his
skull raises the coronet to his lips,
blows, blows, blows, and only
the importance of his breath
whooshes out into the silence.