

CUCKOLD AND KING

Uriah swore his valiant sword to Israel:
A Hittite, he strove to prove allegiance
To Zion's holy cause. And many heathens fell
Before his might who seldom lived to tell
The prowess of Uriah.

As Joab's hand-picked battle-wisest veteran,
Uriah thought himself a lucky man.
Born poor, his soldiering provided much
Of comfort's touch—soft linen, wine and meat, a house
Well shaded by the king's for his new spouse,
That strange shy girl he wed.

His mind was peaceful knowing his wife was sheltered
By more than tent flaps protecting her bed.
But the campaign for Rabbah was going less well
Than spoiling Ammonites had gone. The king
Was needed at the front to lead his troops, to sing
And play his songs of inspiration to them.
Yet David idled in Jerusalem.

Israel was stymied outside Rabbah's wall.
The king sent forth a summons for Uriah
Who hastened to his lord, devoted to his call.
After his report, David gave him leave,
Aimed him toward pleasure, primed him well with meat.
But the guilty plot was wasted on the Hittite
Who joined the kitchen servants for the night
Beside the king's back door.

When David heard, he tried again to replant
The vineyard with the owner's proper seed. Once more
Uriah failed to cover up the deed. "I can't
Indulge my flesh while my comrades suffer
In the fields," he cried, suppressing all his longings
For Bathsheba. But the wintry will of kings
Is seldom denied. David called for seal and quill.
Exquisite feel for punishment and irony
Went in the message to Joab.

Musician's hands with newly learned regality
Put planned execution in the executed's hands.
David watched him go: Uriah had his chance.
He could have kept it all, but no, he chose
A principle. So be it. Every soldier knows
The battle's risks. The army must advance;
Every obstacle to Israel must fall.
Every soldier makes the most of all his weapons.
David sighed. Lately he wearied of war.
Soon...a wedding to prepare for.