

# Cambridge, Circus

*Cambridge, I like you very much / to my great surprise --James Schuyler*

Despite whatever blood got continuously let  
in my name as a law-abiding citizen of the empire,  
I walked for five years in sandals the hot miles  
to Harvard Square once a week to linger  
in four bookstores & watch the chess master  
in the pre-Revolutionary shade serenely massacre  
a half-dozen poseurs as I sipped orange juice  
& glanced through the *Phoenix*. I'd run out

of things to say about the Sandinistas & Panama,  
but at least *Amandla* had nudged apartheid  
a millimeter toward oblivion. Only nor'easters  
pinned me home, between the ancient Italians  
bellowing at the Bruins & the agoraphobic  
indexer hammering a Royal as power ballads  
thundered the sands of sorrow. Playful socialists

did street theater, Southie overturned buses,  
Mattapan seethed, committees formed, disbanded,  
& splintered along these lines or those, all of it  
thirty years gone no matter how hungry the memory  
or offhand the affection, yet Sundays still mean  
rest & reading, Sabbath I've observed since childhood,

no matter the flakes of slaves' blood everywhere.  
Searing fresh anchovies for lunch, I realized how much  
I want to walk the Appian Way, inhaling the summer pall  
Cicero did, fingering like Virgil the trinkets  
in the souvenir stalls, setting the dusty air on fire

like Paul & lest I neglect the reach of Rome's  
lethal ambiguity or forget for a single second  
that nothing disappears, I vow never to disregard  
Caesar, the Catacombs, St. Peter's or Mussolini,

whether historical, metaphorical, or legendary.  
Such ancient, syphilitic filth, such glory rinsed  
clean of doubt, such accommodating brutality—

coin of the American realm, crown of my reading,  
the paving-stone heat I need under my feet. Mewl

about freedom? I prefer the honesty of the Coliseum.

John Repp