

Two poems by Jeffrey Wainwright

Thucydides, what would you say
if you could hear that I am tired,
tired of, don't believe in, broad horizons?
I can gaze all day at a shaft-less garden fork,
heavy-brown with rust, useless, probably ugly,
but a thing that cleaves to me, is felt bodily,
as though it brings news
from the very bowels of truth.

Your war Thucydides was a very great war,
or it was not. It was complete and reasonable,
or a skirmish in the skirmishing.
What you ask is not that I steady myself
and hold the whole world in my head,
that might have been do-able.
No, what you ask is the understanding of it
once we are past cuticles and oxides.

Charlie had too many darlings and too many debts,
upped and went to Canada, not a dickie-bird.
Until a card for his mother said he was in Liverpool,
on a troopship just landed. Then, not a dickie-bird.

It is the Idea of History to see the categories of time,
and within the Idea are different ideas:
it is all a falling-away, a slow bully-roll downwards;
or it marches, always going up, always becoming, always not yet.

Charlie and his doxy, up the alley-way by the brewery, act.
Then, still in time, Charlie finds himself at
1st of July 1916, 07.30 hours, up with the lark.
Perhaps. Never a dickie-bird.

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