FURTHER VARIATIONS OF A TEXT BY VALLEJO

Robert Crum

I will die in Omaha in a heat wave,
on a day when the moon is out,
when the thunderheads mount high
above the horizon, and do not rain,
on a day like any day on the calendar
hung on the back wall of the Goodyear Garage
on which there is a picture of a woman
with large breasts caressing, with her slender fingers,
the smooth, shiny, black treads
of the company's latest radial tire.

It will be a Saturday like today,
because today, Saturday, I can smell,
on this thick breeze from the south,
the stockyards. It's an odor not quite fetid,
not quite sweet, as I imagine death must be
to those not quite happy to be
in Omaha, in a heat wave, on a Saturday.
And I think it will be a Saturday
because today the butchers' wives have packed
the Safeway, and they stand talking beside their cars
in the parking lot, their voices shrill above the traffic,
and even when the traffic is drowned out by a B-52 bomber
taking off from SAC, they keep talking as if nothing happened.

Robert Crum is dead. One Saturday the tissue-thin moon
drifted behind the Mutual of Omaha Building,
and there came a great lowing from the stockyards.
The bourboned butchers stumbled from the bars
into the ripe air, their wives were still talking,
and the pilot of the B-52 mumbled to himself
his secret destination, and the mechanic,
back in the Goodyear Garage where it is cool
and moist and the smell of lubricant
is strong, winked once at the girl on the calendar,
and from the bald retread yanked the pressure stem.