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## Convention Hall

by Alan Shapiro

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There was the amplified and echoing

“optimistic hatred of the actual”

that every flag waving

to make it so kept

waving to the joyous rhythm of

even after

in the docile chaos of a

confetti of balloons

tumbling out of darkness

high above the lights.

Look at Us, the anthem,

Look at Us, the shield,

the sacrifice –

but look

at how unfillable

the cavern of the Great Hall is,

more vacant and silent

for the stage dismantled,

the massive absence

of the cheering and singing; look

at how the last of us,

our delegate

torch in hand

sleepwalks in patrol

patrolling nothing  
like a soldier “in the  
midst of doubt, in  
the collapse of creeds”  
who doesn’t know  
the war has ended,  
behind enemy lines  
no longer there,  
obedient to “a cause  
he little understands,  
in a campaign  
of which he has  
no notion, under  
tactics of which  
he doesn’t see the use”–  
moving in darkness  
from light to smaller light  
along the catwalks  
through the tunnels  
over the swept floor  
to the farthest exit sign.

*Alan Shapiro is a poet and professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is the author of nine poetry books, including Tantalus in Love, Song and Dance, and The Dead Alive and Busy. He received the Kingsley Tufts Award and the Los Angeles Book Prize. He was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 2005, Shapiro won the North Carolina Book Award for poetry, for Tantalus In Love.*

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