

At the Vietnam Memorial

By George Bilgere

The last time I saw Paul Castle
it was printed in gold on the wall
above the showers in the boys'
locker room, next to the school
record for the mile. I don't recall
his time, but the year was 1968
and I can look across the infield
of memory to see him on the track,
legs flashing, body bending slightly
beyond the pack of runners at his back.

He couldn't spare a word for me,
two years younger, junior varsity,
and hardly worth the waste of breath.
He owned the hallways, a cool blonde
at his side, and aimed his interests
further down the line than we could guess.

Now, reading the name again,
I see us standing in the showers,
naked kids beneath his larger,
comprehensive force—the ones who trail
obscurely, in the wake of the swift,
like my shadow on this gleaming wall.

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Bilgere's poetry, while residing firmly in the every-day world of janitors, college students or siblings, is noted for its controlled poignancy and limpid free-verse line. Billy Collins has described him as "a welcome breath of fresh American air." A resident of Ohio, Bilgere lives in Cleveland, where he teaches creative writing at John Carroll University.

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