In Memory of Joe Brainard

By Frank Bidart

deelivered early and long ago)

was in you purity and
sweetness self-gathered, CHosen

When I tried to find words for the moral sense that unifies and sweetens the country voices in your collage The Friendly Way,

you said It’s a code.

You were a code
I yearned to decipher.—

In the end, the plague that full swift runs by took you, broke you;—

in the end, could not

take you, did not break you—

you had somehow erased within you not only meanness, but anger, the desire to punish the universe for everything

not achieved, not tasted, seen again, touched—;

. . . the undecipherable code unbroken even as the soul

learns once again the body it loves and hates is made of earth, and will betray it.