In Memory of Joe Brainard

By Frank Bidart

the remnant of a vast, oceanic
bruise (wound delivered 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.