The Old Liberators

By Robert Hedin

Of all the people in the mornings at the mall,
    it’s the old liberators I like best,
those veterans of the Bulge, Anzio, or Monte Cassino
I see lost in Automotive or back in Home Repair,
bored among the paints and power tools.
Or the really old ones, the ones who are going fast,
who keep dozing off in the little orchards
of shade under the distant skylights.
All around, from one bright rack to another,
their wives stride big as generals,
their handbags bulging like ripe fruit.
They are almost all gone now,
and with them they are taking the flak
and fire storms, the names of the old bombing runs.
Each day a little more of their memory goes out,
darkens the way a house darkens,
its rooms quietly filling with evening,
until nothing but the wind lifts the lace curtains,
the wind bearing through the empty rooms
the rich far off scent of gardens
where just now, this morning,
light is falling on the wild philodendrons.