Poetry

Even Dante

9/11 ten years after

would have fallen silent,
would have let the fires
smoke and flare and lick
the poisoned air for a decade
or longer then burn and smolder
until memory had been consumed.

He would have fallen into a dark dream
unpunctuated by light or leaping bodies
or the smell of scorched bones
and he would have known his words
would not startle or soothe
or stir souls.

He would have known the sky had been torn
irreparably and could not be re-sewn.
He would have known his adjectives
would carry no sting or luster
that his nouns would seem
anchorless as drifting dunes

and he would have withheld
his pen his black and golden
visions and written nothing
about the Twin Towers: not
a single hushed moan.

He would have known that meaning
had been murdered and would not be
re-born. Dante would have known
and held back his music.

Let the Drums be Silenced

Drums beat in our fingers
a slow tattoo of homeland:
it is the blood of our fathers
painted in ceremonial violet,
our mothers' blood — gouts
of virtue and outrage

Under the slits of face-masks,
we think ourselves emperors
and pharaohs: if violence is done
to us, we will admonish with violence
If this is battle, we will sacrifice
everything to win

In our hunger to dream a future,
drums beat, drums beat in our fingers.
Violent sons and daughters,
how can we know the bodies we touch
in tenderness will not be drummed
out of existence?

– Charles Fishman*

* *Dr. Fishman is a poet and Professor Emeritus at the State University of New York. Address: Dr. Charles Fishman, 56 Wood Acres Rd, Patchogue, NY 11772-6221, USA. Email: carolus@optimum.net*