

SIMON GIRTY

1812 WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO TURN

By 70, he was nearly blind
and almost every afternoon would make his way
on horseback along the river road
to drink and tell stories
at his favourite public house
owned by a friend
By nightfall, he was done in
and someone would help him
to his horse and it would take him back
to the farm at the mouth of the Detroit
He cared nothing for the war
except for the fields and the corn
he sold to the army

Or that's what he'd tell the men
who drank with him
and no one dared interrupt
—after all, was he not the one who burned
an American militiaman at the stake?
Did he not dangle enemy scalps
from his belt?

Or that's what he'd tell the men
at night when they'd surround his table
and lean in close to learn
if all the tales were true
and why the great Shawnee chief
had come to see him on the farm
at the edge of town
or to find out how much he feared
the Americans crossing the river
And they wanted to know what it was like
to finish off a man who begged for mercy
But the old blind Indian guide dismissed them again
saying he cared nothing for war, nothing for death
except to vow he'd be buried along the river
and curse any American for digging him up



painting by Hal Sherman

Or that's what he would tell the men
and then, he'd push his way past
the rowdy pub, and lurch out into the cold
where his horse rested in the night
and he'd ride home, often dozing off
under a moonlit sky, fearing nothing
not even the darkness, and maybe deep down
was sorry, and mourned the loss
of a brother and the death of his family
and maybe *hate* was always there
But he cared nothing for war
and what it left you when
there was nowhere else to turn

Or that's what he'd tell the men