If Poetry Were Outlawed

Jimmy’s at the blackboard shifting
his weight and fingerling the crumpled paper
stuffed in his pocket that reads

*with up so floating many bells down.*
He’s thinking about the buzz he’ll get
when he reads it, nothing hard, just enough

to get him through the day. The girl in the back
is already gone, mumbling *I saw the best minds
of my generation destroyed by madness* and too baked
to hide the paraphernalia on her desk,
the scraps of worn paper, the old book whose pages
she rolls and unrolls between her fingers,

watching the words curl. In the streets a homeless man
begs for change but the pot-smoking professionals
pass him by and the corporate cokeheads too,

thinking, I know what he’ll spend it on anyway,
and who can blame them? They’ve all seen him buying verse
on the corner, they’ve heard him ranting

*April is the cruellest month.* Besides, there’s always someone
who takes more than he can handle, who thinks he’s got
*many and many a year ago*

*in a kingdom by the sea* until the words start crashing
against his eyes and rocketing through his skull
and all he can hear is this mysterious

gravelly voice whispering *I celebrate myself, and sing myself*
and the world explodes in wheeling colors which rain down
around him and rupture into light. He starts running
into the streets where all the cars are shrieking around him
until they race him to the hospital where his girlfriend
runs up sobbing something about hope

*Hope is the thing with feathers* and he starts begging for more,
his whole body in spasms, and he’s shouting baby,
you gotta help me! And before they drag her

away she stands there soaked in sweat and tears screaming
*The Apparition of These Faces in the Crowd!*
and oh

the sound just rushes through him, courses through his veins
until he shudders, gape-mouthed,
and lies still.