DEATH IN THE JUNGLE

Sanford Sternlicht

So long ago,
the small, khaki-clad man,
his crooked piston-calves
pumping madly,
jumped through the hoop of fire
that framed the smoke-filled cave,
and stumbled blindly in
the charred and trampled grass.
He wore a cloak of flame
and a crown of burning hair.
A bird-like screech escaped
the half-face and the piece of lip,
winding around my body
like a coil of barbwire.
Mechanically, my young
and well-taught arms
raised the carbine shoulder high
and squeezed a drop of death
into the tropic air.
My brown fantastic fell
into a pile of smoking suet,
and from the time
I stepped over that burning lump of fat
till now,
I never asked the simple question,
why?