

Charlie Leppert  
**Justified**

<i>this is the horrific</i>	bedtime story of a
<i>generation's</i>	nightly news
<i>mythology, the accrual of</i>	reasoning. this is the story of
<i>children,</i>	a nation—but I am
<i>redundant - of the learning,</i>	the unlearning,
<i>and then the reteaching,</i>	and then the forgetting.
<i>this is</i>	the story of
<i>the punishment of the bestial,</i>	the sacrifice,
<i>and what could be more monstrous than</i>	the punishment of a nation's
<i>children, for the sins of their</i>	oligarchs, for the want of something
<i>dark and</i>	profitable and innocent, and
<i>wet bodies torn from the earth.</i>	this is the story of
<i>a forgettable king and</i>	a mountain, or
<i>a forgettable king and</i>	a tower, or
<i>a forgettable king and</i>	two towers -
<i>rivers of blood—</i>	you understand,
<i>don't you become the</i>	loss? this is the story of a
<i>war, a</i>	tale that ends, or doesn't, a
<i>war</i>	game that never begins and so
<i>does not have to end.</i>	this is the story of a schoolyard scuffle,
<i>a bloody nose,</i>	a piece of fabric, a misunderstanding,
<i>writ large and deadly.</i>	this is the story of
<i>collateral damage,</i>	the crumpling of steel like paper
<i>in your hand, the leveling of nations</i>	with the sweep of an open palm—
<i>heavy with wet black blood—</i>	white with dust.
<i>this is a memory</i>	hazy with distance
<i>of</i>	a thin
<i>black</i>	line of smoke across the sky, seen through
<i>summer leaves</i>	and never
<i>forgotten.</i>	

**NOTE:** This poem is a contrapuntal, and so should be read from top to bottom through each column, then across both columns.