

Before I speak

This poem has not yet been written
and before it is I want to say I respect
the President of the United States,
the man himself and his office

and I respect what the people
mean when they say *Democracy*
though I do not know what this
might have to do with being armed

and having put these points like this
as plainly as possible
on the table here between us
I can warn you I might be saying tomorrow

or perhaps in a few days time
depending on my mood and inner music
that there will be
no agreement, no truce, no bipartisan understanding

and no poem
until the military ceases
to buy the bullets made in the precision workshops
of Missouri, Iran and Africa.

This poem, as you know, has not yet been written
and in protest at the militarization of education,
work and death,
it might never be written or spoken.

You will understand what silence is
when this poem remains unwritten,
uncreated and forever unspoken.
But I want you to know
this poem, even if never written,
holds the President of Russia
in severe respect, the man himself and his office —

this is
in case you might misunderstand
what is meant
when what must be said fails to be spoken.