A FEW BARS, A FEW BARBS: Webern Op 28

(a homage to Thomas Gleghorn)

This fence wire beyond barriers of sound, as a fast-forward silver-strung bullet train, hurtles through posthole tunnels, ducking at points curving round bristling coveys of upright tree growth. Up and down stooping with hill and gully slopes (as telegraph lines seen from a train) each hitch/sag, hitch/sag, post after post after post. At last at stopped right-angle of fence’s corner post, the strainer, there’s and end to it.

This is the virgin wire unreeled on battlefields: curled around trench parapets, ammo dumps, even quarantine stations, deathly concentration camps, where they have buttressed posts, sirens, lights. And, yes, loose coils glistening, almost pretty under rimless glint of moon. Threaded, looped, these twinkling stars direct intrepid navigators, who choose or are chosen to donate to its barbs their trifling shards of flesh.
My boot stubs rusty wire at dusk in the
rubbish tip of my grandfather’s long lost
farm. Memory pricks from point to point:
the axe he bounced off a tough white-gum bough,
near went through his foot; a carving fork in
a dinner-table fight that pierced palm
of his son’s hand; the knife point that lacked
compassion to spare another’s startled eye.
I wasn’t part of all that. This barbed strand

of my blundering boot brands me
interloper. Not welcome on property
that’s changed hand. May as well
be one of the band of illegals,
come in leaky boats to find that
in this land of ours storm trooping men
have put up well-braced
barb-wired fences round a one time
friendly nation’s bloodied heart. 2009