

Language

About the turtles who died copulating forty million years ago
And sunk to the bottom of the sea—
The male's tail tucked, meaning he died inside
Her death—"poisoned by a sudden flood
Of carbon dioxide," one scientist remarked,

"Just like a bottle of champagne popping."

Just like a scientist, reaching for figure to speak of death.
Bearing meaning inside death,
The bitter whoosh of feeling at looking on
What is no more, what was to have been.
Pang of the looked-at world glimpsed then lost.

Like the two terminals of the nine-volt battery
Touched to what was to have been my tongue
In that world. Touched
To the what was to have been.
Nails of light hammered out of the water.

Out of the pit it sparkles a little,
This small, tessellated body of bodies.
Sparkles a little in the harsh, surfeit of light.
Air aglare. Future's suture.
Color of preservation. Color of hurt.

Touching the what is
To what was to have been,
Composing
Us. Two terminals.
What we don't say

Standing before this ocean. That day.
The cold physical abstract girth of it.
One of many disguises, perhaps—but not "humiliating."
One cannot feel as it moves any one way about it
For very long. And that's to love.

The Love of Repetition Is Happiness

Today my name is a pseudonym.
I was thinking about K., writing
In his diary the date, the eighth
Of September, and the exclamation
Point flourishing after it.
Something unspilled unconcealed
Seemed to be emerging then retreating.
A leopard appeared on the kitchen table:
The rattle of the refrigerator
Frightened it into the world
Of appearances. My teeth hurt. It was
Nothing personal. Become aware of
The leopard, the dog shifted
On its bed, emitted a low growl.
I thought of E., who wanted arrows,
Axes, nectar, and growling.

Here at least the growling. To be
Pierced by anything. The urge to always,
To think *always, always*, familiar
Urge, to return, to come back, as if back
Is home, as if home is a point on a circle
In which—*Voluptates commendat rarior
Usus*—Juvenal growls from the wine
Lover's desk calendar. To be
A voluptuary of anything, to feel
Uncalendrical, opened by the daunted axe
Of the day. Sweet gravel of each surface,
Ribboning.

On Nostalgia

1.

If I ever get enough money, Jack said,
I'll be an alcoholic. That's
The best life there is.

2.

The unsaid
Has many faces,
Like a shirt with unnecessary buttons.

3.

A blue gratuity, an authentic functionless
-ness one wants
To undo, though not all at once.

4.

I have, almost

As hard as I can,
Tried to make my shame into a lemon
So I could discover it.
It only hurt
Other people.

5.

Wounds are open, Jack.

That's the point
About wounds.

They don't have, "resolve
Into," faces.

6.

What they have
Is reality.

7.

There's never enough money. That
Is the market truth. That
Is the lemon, the boy in the blue bathing suit.

8.

Nostalgia is
More. Just more.

Like a beautiful old car engine.

9.

Would that we all could be
So reduced
In our desires.

10.

If they wake up people look back.

Glaciology

In Japan they're developing
A square watermelon.
The problem's curvature:
The hard rind, the packaging.
The problem's the new thing.
Each arugula leaf in the pre-
Packaged bag cut to the same shape.
Four rounded pale-green edges,
And a top curled like a tongue.
It's a kind of puzzle. Each piece
Not too bitter, not too sweet.
The maximum cut. Small alteration
That compounds, not meaning but
Gains. The maximum
Cut. If the apple grows too big
It's not a saleable fruit. Throw it out.

How does the red go in this sky?
Why does the map break here
And not over there? This is an edge
And this a corner. This is the
Picture and this the table where we
Leave the puzzle when we go to bed.
In the morning, the same piles,
Same disorder, the rectangle
And the leaves, the box in its
Completeness. Here is where we
Stand under two miles of ice.
Here is hunger. Here, poverty.
The problem's the rhythm of production.
The problem's scale.
Here what it costs to kill a terrorist
And here, to feed the problem.

Ghosts and Indices

I had been eating apples,
Reading poems before falling asleep,
Turning all the things with faces toward the walls,
Going through the motions of closure.
I kept reading poems by women about unnamed birds
Thrashing inside various bodies and poems by men
About being fish. These said they
Were notes to the future. Then the dead birds
And the dead fish were in another
Poem, a vast, abstract poem, shaped like a cube.
That poem was about ghosts and indices.
Its edges were rounded from so much touching.
But it appeared so touched as a monument
To touching. It was made for neglect.
It was like a city or a reliquary, a piece of bone
With a hole in it tuned to two notes
Or a ring from the nostril of a beast of burden.
Trying to read it was like being in a gender neutral bathroom
Hastily converted into an interrogation cell.
Or being buried in a leftover wedge of cemetery next to a palisade.
Or being alone after reading a destroyed sonnet
With golden hair trailing through fingers.
Everywhere I turned I sensed it breathing.
But it was, predictably, the absence I sensed.
And then I slept like a pill in a pillbox.
And then I slept like a flying fish.
And then I slept like grains of sand in the mouth.
And then I slept like an angry people.