

## Who Among Us?

At some point, way back, there must have been  
but one left: just one Neanderthal.  
Those cousins of ours—though not kissing cousins,  
what with the embarrassingly rotten teeth  
and those hurt dog's eyes cowering  
beneath ramparts of brow—just one.

And perhaps one of our boys came upon this last  
limb of that regrettable branch of the family tree  
fresh in aloneness, perhaps holed up  
in a close cave, even, strewing her mate's  
corpse with rank wildflowers.  
Her full, round belly balanced atop squatting haunches,  
and she keening as though with a mouth  
full of marbles, voice deep as a man's.

Who among us would condemn  
that early homo sapiens for rolling a large boulder  
against the cave's mouth, stopping the hole  
and her demented crooning? Who would deny  
the rightness of pruning the moribund branch  
so this tree of ours could grow?

And so Mr. Sapiens, concerned to prevent  
unnecessary suffering, did: seated that rock  
tight as an eye in its socket, stoppering the faint  
whinings of his proto-conscience deep  
within his uniquely large brain-chamber.

“Who among us hasn’t been forced to kill  
past and alternate selves?” Mr. Sapiens mused  
as he dusted his elegant hands, straightened  
his blazer, and went off hoping  
to make the 5:30 train for the east end.  
“Surely one for the history books,” he went  
whistling tunelessly, “One for wifey  
over her special meatloaf and mashed.”