

Masthead Logo

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Remember Death

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That's why all good music is sad.
It makes the sound of the end before the end,
and leaves behind it
the ghost of the part that was sacrificed,
a chord to represent the membrane,
broken only once, that keeps the world away.
That's how the fish became the metaphor:
one lithe and silvery life impaled,
fighting death with its own failing beauty,
thrashing on the apex of its fear.
Art was once my cold solace,
the ice-pack I held to love's torn body,
but that was before I lay
as if asleep above the wavering reef,
or saw the barbed spear strike the fish
that seemed for an instant to be
something outside myself, before I knew
that the sea was my bed and the fish was me.

REMEMBER DEATH

Nothing in the red leaves
distinguishes this year from any other.
The haunted planet could be sloughing off
its worn-out parts in any age,
spreading its musky bedding
under the trees for us to lie on.
I look up over his shoulder as he enters me,
up into the high vaults
of the Church of the Falling Leaf,
and hear the swollen hum, and see
not ten feet above us
the pale gray paper of the nest,
the branch bent down,
wasps dropping from the hole
like little paratroopers

then shooting sideways away.
The small sticks hurt my back
but not very much, not enough to rouse me
from the sweet slide in and out
which says I'm here, I'm here,
I'm here in the river of stinging leaves.
And I'll be back — that gets said
in the slowness of the good-bye.