

Lives of the Poets

So part of the problem you see is I
can't tell if I'm writing to you or me.

Nine years afloat in an unstoppered bottle
learning to walk with my back doubled over

scuttling across this desert beach
trying to read your message in birdcalls

the slapping of waves reiterating
what can't be remembered and who we were

before parting company with that
odd school of fish who thought

about thought, making the mind
a self-reflective concavity

watching itself talk to itself
minding the breath fogging the glass,

who thought to fill the wavering
panes of our cold water flats with something

more than images of ourselves
overlooking the bay, something

having to do with something more
than linguistic opportunities

time spent on syllables
taking our one-eyed friend in hand

something more than thoughts and feelings
leaving vapor trails under the belljar

something more than precious wit
played out on glazed surfaces

pretending uncertainty negates

common sense as well as meaning

something that would make love more
than rubbing the head against abstraction

a matter of fiction in moments of heat
trying to create ourselves

as more than an exercise in life
science seduced into syllogisms

out of the high proof haze shackled up
behind the private eye's pulp friction

that part of the brain we call the heart
tucked away between memory

imagination and desire —
jocks bad boys and closet cases

'A' students and manic depressives
cocktail contests of binary visions

cross-eyed jacks and four-eyed queens
still sixteen in the backseat—

something more feasible than saints
or red-lipped refugees from Eden

those envoys of interim satisfactions
frustrations and various irksome issues

what the popular press calls dreams
while waging wars of syntax with flanking

pincer martin motions, something
more than rebuilding the fabled bridge

so recently and rudely collapsed
into the temporal cavity

that white starburst just north of the ear

somewhere in the vicinity of

extreme dysfunction utter verbal
paralysis angry little electrons

splitting the nuclear family
the triple goddess and triune god

arms incestuously entwined
into particles highly charged

their radioactive offspring
the daughters of Albion running the ridge

howling for blood in the name of love
with something more in their bag of tricks

than phonics and semiotics something
the next quake might leave standing

among the lawns and faculty wives
lying there where working class

meant running scams on academe
public talks on public matters

titillating the waspish ladies
in their paper-thin privacies

with deference and inference
while teaching jargon to one another

the virtues of obscurity
the benefits of obliquity

personal validity
the comma's resounding utility

the quirks of arcane harmony
perverted into monotony

yet looking for means beyond the image,

for wherewithal, to give type-cast

characters displayed meticu-
lously on a page voice:

trying not so much to cure
as to maintain bipolar disorder

whitewashing the broken lines
down the middle of the road

traffic like bats out of hell on both
sides in opposite directions

confessing the wet Freudian slip
the lipsynch personality split

little men and women not there
at the top of the stare, yes,

and a plaque in the corner, but
for want of a little salt in the brain

a short circuit, dropped ground,
cross-wired hemispheres

neural hypersufficiency
frontal lobe atrophy

taking the course between
pedestrian and pedantic

with a twist of lime
a cigarette and coffee

a shot or two straight up
or out of a spoon a hit

out of the public eye
uppers to keep going

hand on the neck
lip to lip

trying to suck
the genius out

of the bottle
the end of a pipe