

I BURN BAG

THE SOLIPSIST

Don't be misled:
that sea-song you hear
when the shell's at your ear?
It's all in your head.

That primordial tide—
the slurp and salt-slosh
of the brain's briny wash—
is on the inside.

Truth be told, the whole place,
everything that the eye
can take in, to the sky
and beyond into space,

lives inside of your skull.
When you set your sad head
down on Procrustes' bed,
you lay down the whole

universe. You recline
on the pillow: the cosmos
grows dim. The soft ghost
in the squishy machine,

which the world is, retires.
Someday it will expire.
Then all will go silent
and dark. For the moment,

however, the black-
ness is just temporary.
The planet you carry
will shortly swing back

from the far nether regions.
And life will continue—
but only *within* you.
Which raises a question

that comes up again and again,
as to why
God would make ear and eye
to face *outward*, not in?

AT LAKE SCUGOG

1

Where what I see comes to rest,
at the edge of the lake,
against what I think I see

and, up on the bank, who I am
maintains an uneasy truce
with who I fear I am,

while in the cabin's shade, the gap between
the words I said
and those I remember saying

is just wide enough to contain
the remains that remain
of what I assumed I knew.

2

Out in the canoe, the person I thought you were
gingerly trades spots
with the person you are

and what I believe I believe
sits uncomfortably next to
what I believe.

When I promised *I will always give you
what I want you to want,*
you heard, or desired to hear,

something else. As, over and in the lake,
the cormorant and its image
traced paths through the sky.

REGRET

I'd like to take back my not saying to you
those things that, out of politeness, or caution,
I kept to myself. And, if I may—
though this might perhaps stretch the rules—I'd like
to take back *your* not saying some of the things
that you never said, like “I love you” and “Won't you
come home with me,” or telling me, which
you in fact never did, perhaps in the newly
refurbished café at the Vancouver Art
Gallery as fresh drops of the downpour from which
we'd sought shelter glinted in your hair like jewels,
or windshields of cars as seen from a plane
that has just taken off or is just coming in
for a landing, when the sun is at just the right angle,
that try as you might, you could not imagine
a life without me. The passionate spark
that would have flared up in your eye as you said this—
if you had said this—I dream of it often.
I won't take those back, those dreams, though I would,
if I could, take back your not kissing me, openly,
extravagantly, not caring who saw,
or those looks of anonymous animal longing
you'd throw everyone else in the room. I'd like
to retract my retracting, just before I grabbed you,
my grabbing you on the steps of the New York
Public Library (our failure to visit
which I would also like to recall)
and shouting for all to hear, “You, you
and only you!” Yes, I'd like to take back
my not frightening the pigeons that day with my wild

protestations of uncontrolled love, my not scaring
them off into orbit, frantic and mad,
even as I now sit alone, frantic and mad,
racing to unread the book of our love
before you can finish unwriting it.

STAIN

Spreads by exceeding itself.
Spreads by letting the world waver, bend,
and fold into its dark borders.
On a map it would be a poorly-known nation
seething with imperial ambition.
Or it's something one found on the leaves of a book,
where it has blotted out the crucial word,
the puzzle-piece that reveals the murderer's
identity, the name of the girl that sent
the love letter, the ultimate fate of the star-
(or double-)crossed lovers. Or else on my skin,
like a tattoo I asked to have put there, or
the birthmark that canceled my childhood.
What land grew the plant whose powder composed
this ink? What ships carried it in what bottles?
I have seen it half-flashed, subliminally sensed
against a blank field of sky
through whose invisible perforations
the starlight would soon come flooding.
I think I have seen it coiled and concealed
like a viper deep in my lover's glance,
or spread on the crust of my heart or lung
in the spectral eye of the x-ray.
It is, perhaps, my signature,
or that of the one who released me. Or merely
an insect, squashed between the ponderous pages
of the definitive work on something or other
by some impertinent reader.

LOBSTERS

tend to cluster in prime numbers, sub-oceanic bundles of bug consciousness submerged in waking slumber, plunged in pits of murk-black water. They have coalesced

out of the pitch and grime and salt suspended within that atmospheric gloom. Their skin is colorless below. But when exposed to air, they start to radiate bright green,

then, soon, a siren red that wails: *I'm dead*. The meat inside, though, is as white as teeth, or the hard-boiled egg that comes to mind when one cracks that crisp shell and digs beneath.

Caress the toothy claw-edge of its pincer and you will know the single, simple thought that populates its mind. The lobster trap is elegance itself: one moving part: the thing that's caught.