

## THE PARTS OF SPEECH

He imagined it in slow  
motion reverse: words, hers,  
he made travel back  
from his extremities  
into the slowly un-comprehending  
brain that sorted them  
back into grammar, lost them dipped  
in pits of now ungathering feeling,  
then exited them as sound  
from the ears to air  
that carried them between.  
The sound-shocks receded  
to disappear between her lips  
and teeth, through the mouth  
and down the throat to the voice box  
(a present, someone joked,  
you can open all your life),  
to change finally to impulse  
and pleasure/pain somewhere  
in the deep cells of her brain  
(in normal forward time  
all this took only  
a second or two: "I love you").  
For now he and she live out  
the poet's hopeful truth  
that speech is the mean,  
the whole and parts of it  
standing against death's extreme  
by which tongues are changed  
to small rubbery tombstones  
that mark every silence  
but a hurt one.  
May this image help them survive  
speech's later betrayals.