

Modernism

For Amy England

And "I" is a conjecture,
simile that's become science:
calyx torn down both sides, the only
decipherable word among five

Bird nest supplied by paraphrase,
some spurious other, much restored:
talents are money, two mutilated words
hence the extension beyond lexicography

Death as a gift, a ruin of paper
for the opulence of Gyges:
"calamitous" perhaps sounds like
opening the right-hand half

You have taken a cricket
by the wing, mixed thighs and
courtly love: papyrus burned at the top
a black-butted fellow, badly damaged

The meaning is obscene, Eros' red balls
earlier than arrows: they vomited
their mass of pride from a pottery shard
The same papyrus gives "ear dripping blood"

*This poem is comprised entirely of phrases from Guy Davenport's
notes for his volume of translations, 7 Greeks (New Directions).
The phrases have been rather drastically selected, condensed, and
rearranged, but only one word has been altered.*