

It's the words to the long slow sad
familiar hymn about the hourglass.

I lie beside my love
in the silence between two waves,

the grains of my body pouring.
I know that the second wave will ripen

and fall. It will fall in a world
that is emerald and sapphire,

lit by the sparks of the sea. A world
that will darken and abandon me.

WHY ALL GOOD MUSIC IS SAD

Before I knew that I would die,
I lolled in the cool green twilight
over the reef, the hot sun on my back,
watching the iridescent schools
flick and glide among stone flowers,
and the lacy fans blow back and forth
in the watery winds of the underworld.
I saw the long, bright muscle of a fish
writhing on a spear, spasm and flash,
a music violent and gleaming,
abandoned to its one desire.
The white radiance of Perdido
filtered down through the rocking gloom
so that it was Perdido there too,
in that strange, stroking, half-lit world.
Before I knew that love
would end my willful ignorance of death,
I didn't think there was much
left in me that was virgin, but there was.

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