

Space Walk

A vacuum, they assured me, pushing me
into the airlock, buckling on my
bubble head. Just that one idea —
nothing, the void, the great by and by.
But nothing turns out to be everything,
and everything is music, swelling chords
of darkness-piercing light, every star singing
the song of fire! But those are just words —
what else to say when they reeled me in?
The words felt like stones revolving around
the dead suns of what I would never tell
them. All I could do was point at the spinning
cosmos, that vacuum filled with the sound
they already knew — their heaven, their hell.

He'll Be Remembered

He'll be remembered for the hair, I guess,
and preposterous neckties, and his name
will be a synonym for something less
than promised, a punchline for drinking games,
the name they'll invoke at spelling bees
when the winning word is *braggadocio*
and some skinny, owl-eyed kid asks, "Please
use it in a sentence?" and there they'll go
again with that Dickensian name . . . and I'll
always think of poker, his final sneer
of malevolent, stolen triumph while
slapping down the ace of spades, till he hears
the howls of laughter at the man who loses
everything to a lousy pair of deuces.

Foxholes

When the time was right he told us about
the war — boredom, fear, and loneliness most
of the time, then terror and noise, and shouting,
screaming, the pop and heave of guns, ghost
moments that never go away and things
that cannot be unseen. *That's where I found
God, he said — where I found love, and the sting
of knowing what love means, how we're all wounded
and scared, doomed but still alive — alive!*
He told us about foxholes and bargains
with fate, grasping for anything to drive
away the onrush of death, make the pain
stop, hush the noise. *And I'm still in that war,
still in that foxhole, he said — we all are.*

— *for W.W.*

Edges

Let people bicker over who made what —
isn't everybody making? Aren't we
made for making — building, devising? But
more than that — looking for some kind of freedom
for later, some kind of heaven? I
look for it in this forest, at the edge
between summer and winter, day and night.
I look for it in tidepools, at the edge
between the sea and the land, between strange
and stranger. I look for it where the flats
meet the mountains. The edges are the welfare
of the world, the crucibles of change
and chance, the portals between this and that —
the places where the world creates itself.

The Birth of Language
(Reflections on Recycling Night)

Back in the caves, when we were showing off
our shiny new opposable thumbs
and tottering on our hind legs, enough
of us must have had the insight that some
stuff was worth holding onto, and some not —
decisions would have to be made. This stone,
that stick — keepers. But shattered sticks and rotten
meat and broken blades and blackened bones,
things whose very presence was burdensome —
into the midden. What need for words when
we stared into the embers, felt that odd
wonderment at the stars and where we come
from? No. The first useful word must have been
trash — before *tool*, before *fire*, before *God*.