

The yard behind my house drops hard
into the nearby wood. Lying in the wet grass
I can look up at the dark hazy sky
for hours. I stink of mosquito spray
and these pants will never wash clean.
I've turned out the porch lights
and the neighbors don't have power yet
so it's as dark as it will ever be again
out here in the suburbs.
Only the fiercest stars and a couple of stray planets
are visible through the dome of Atlanta's dirty atmosphere.
Other times even those few can't be seen and I wonder
what pale dreams they must evoke
in some modern child denied the glory of the Milky Way.

Once I regarded the soiling of the heavens
as man's last sin, the killing of the age.
My own age taught me nothing dramatic
ever happens; things just go on, but changed.
Now I listen to the singing of frogs,
the distant bark of a chained dog,
the whine of frustrated mosquitoes,
while I look up and enjoy the remaining stars.
Memory fills the near blank canvas
with the black violet of my youth
set with diamond points. Blue dwarfs
and red giants sail in mythological formations
across my imagination, held forever in place
by reminiscence.

What, I wonder, must you be thinking,
lying here with me through the dense hours?
Are you remembering those crystal skies
of your childhood Texas? Or enjoying the symphony
of the wild creatures in your own forest?
I find it easy to believe
that I am nowhere near the mark. Perhaps you are
considering what you read today, or asking
yourself what would make a good supper,
or even speculating on what it is that I am thinking.
On a warm May evening, it doesn't seem right to ask.
Better to guess wrong than to dispel this quiet.

My mother once said that a blind man

has other senses more acute in balance.
Perhaps that is what has happened to me.
The sky has diminished, so I have found
other wonders to incur my awe:
the crafting of tons of steel to ride on the wind,
circuitry we program to mimic our own thoughts
following an individual atom through the body's labyrinth.
Simple-minded, I smile even now to think
what marvels await my late discovery.
Every step we take together, every new discovery
belongs to all of us. I see a race of men
who plunder knowledge instead of their world;
I have an infant faith that we can learn
faster than we destroy.

So it is that here we lie in the spaces between time,
watching a murky night slide over us
content in our lives in spite of our world
and because of it at the same time.
Against my will, I know that time returns
to take us back inside. Lunches to pack,
dishes to put away, laundry to dry--
a thousand details carved in the edges
of a life worth living. I wonder
as we brush the grass from our clothes
where I ever got the idea
that it would be hard to be happy.