

1985

# Death and Morality

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the way my father lies there now with his  
eyes open, then the lids come down and the  
milky crescent of the other world  
shines there for a moment before sleep.  
I cannot push him forward or hold him back,  
I just stay beside him the way the boat  
stays abreast of the Channel swimmer at night,  
you know you cannot touch them, you see them  
faintly glowing there in the dark water,  
the strong pathetic star-shape of the human body.

### DEATH AND MORALITY

The one thing I like about my father's dying  
is it is not evil. It is not good  
and it is not bad, it is out of the moral world altogether,  
and once I am out of the moral world  
I can live as easily as any animal  
made to live in the element it inhabits.  
I can watch them empty his catheter bag,  
pouring the pale ember fluid  
into the big hospital measuring cup, it is  
neither good nor bad, it is only beautiful,  
it is just the body. Even his pain, when his  
face contracts, and his mouth makes a thick  
sucking snap when his jaws draw back  
is not bad, no one is doing it to him,  
there is no guilt, no shame,  
there is only pleasure and pain. This is the  
world where sex lives, the world of the  
nerves, the world without God,  
the world of seasons, the creation of the earth,

we kiss him in it, we stroke back his gummed  
gelatinous hair, his wife and I  
on either side, we wipe the flow of  
saliva like ivory clay from the side of his mouth,  
his body feels us loving him  
outside the world of the moral, as if we were  
making love to him in the woods  
and far away in the field we could hear the  
distant hymns of the tent-meeting,  
smaller than the smallest drop of green-black  
woods dew on his body as we dip to touch him.

### STILL LIFE

I lie on my back after making love,  
breasts white in shallow curves like the lids of soup dishes,  
nipples shiny as berries, speckled and immutable.  
My legs lie down there somewhere in the bed like those  
great silver fish drooping over the edge of the table.  
Scene of destruction, scene of perfect peace,  
sex bright and calm and luminous as the  
scarlet and blue dead pheasant all  
maroon neck feathers and deep body wounds,  
and on the center of my forehead a drop of water  
round and opalescent, and in it  
the self-portrait of the artist, upside down,  
naked, holding your brushes dripping like torches with light.