

1990

# Remember Death

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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

then shooting sideways away.  
The small sticks hurt my back  
but not very much, not enough to rouse me  
from the sweet slide in and out  
which says I'm here, I'm here,  
I'm here in the river of stinging leaves.  
And I'll be back — that gets said  
in the slowness of the good-bye.