

son of toad

someone recently asked my kid,
john william (kubla) locklin,
what he wants to be when he grows up.
he said, "a toad."

naturally i was as thrilled as any father
whose son aspires to follow in his steps.

here then, my boy, is what you may look forward to:
an onanistic adolescence,
a promising but brief young manhood,
consummating in a steep descent into obesity,
declining powers, and the nether twilight
this side of oblivion.

son, i would like to spare you this,
but another of the toad-conditions
is the forfeiture of the capacity
to alleviate the destiny of one's loved ones.

what's more, all that is offered in compensation
is the chance than an occasional young girl
or literary magazine will find insensitivity refreshing.

think it over, my beautiful and innocent young john-john:
wouldn't you prefer to be the eagle, lion, or the shark?

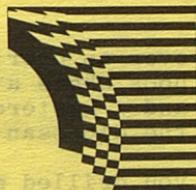
if, however, your mind is irrevocably set,
accept this charge: you must always wear
the verdant mantle with a wry hauteur ...
and never reveal the secret of making love toad-style.

the hook shot

at one time basketball was my life.
no one taught me more about the game
than don garland, my eighth grade coach.
he was a big man, firm and gentle;

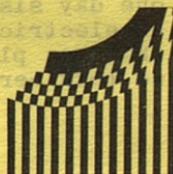
only his patience exceeded the bulk
of his forearms. i never knew him to
raise his voice -- but who had the
cojones to test him? he was the man.

he drilled me nightly in the hook shot:
bounce pass, step to the basket, lean
with the shoulder, brace with the elbow,
sight the glass target, and arc it up lightly.



locklin

gerald



over an over, a couple hundred
hook shots a night, but i loved it,
and i mastered it, and we won
the diocesan tournament.

you drilled me well, mr. garland;
nothing is more a part of me than my hook shot.
when i can't sleep at night,
i count hook-shots, not sheep.

and how i wish you had been my mentor
in other skills as well, like writing
and fucking and lying and being a father,

but i'm not sure how many of these
were really up your alley.
still, would that the quatrain
were as second-nature as the hook shot.

even now, on those rare occasions
when i get down to the outdoor courts,
it's nice to have the hook shot going for me;
it's about all i have left.

one last thing: i can still picture your face.
i have almost no visual imagination;
i can't for instance, remember what my first wife looked
like,
but i can still picture your stepping towards me,
feeding me a bounce pass. i hope your life
(like mine) has had its moments.

pedagogy

in sixth grade they gave us a belgian nun.
she was just learning the language, and she often
had to ask the english word for something.
little things, like doorknobs, blackboard, chalk.

we were a rotten and sadistic bunch.
we gloried in sabotage.
our previous teacher was now in r-wing of the local
hospital,
which is where you went when you couldn't stop screaming.

one day sister bonita asked us what you call
an electric outlet -- you know, the thing on the wall
that you plug the plug into.
we told her it was called a cunt.