

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.

she left the room to find the janitor, to explain what it was of hers that needed fixing, what it was exactly that she couldn't fit the plug into. she returned to class a tearful but a wiser woman.

which reminds me of a piece of profound advice imparted to me by a young professor upon the occasion of my going forth from graduate school: "remember, locklin," he said, his hand upon my tweedy shoulder, "in teaching you are always dealing with the criminal mentality."

a later poem for maureen

i've been obsessed with it of late,
that picture of maureen, our love-child in her arms,
she still upon the operating table,
slightly dopey, but relieved of pain,

transfigured.
they took a snapshot of her,
and her face was clean and sharp and radiant;
it shone a rodent innocence.

mo, life is not as clean and sharp
as your smile in that radiant instant;
still, how did i make it go away,
that unifying flash?

a paragraph from the financial page

i sometimes fall into a lamentable habit
of post-talkshow newspaper perusal.
i tope a few last drinks and linger over
batting averages, illiterate letter-writers,

and the latest recipe for le poulet parisienne.
the other night i came upon an interview
with a successful financier. he'd written
a best-seller on the stock market

and his first principle was simple:
pick a blue chip; buy it; keep it.
well, that rang a bell,
because my aunt elizabeth