

TORTOISE SHOUT

I thought he was dumb,
I said he was dumb,
Yet I've heard him cry.

First faint scream,
Out of life's unfathomable dawn,
Far off, so far, like a madness, under the horizon's
 dawning rim,
Far, far off, far scream.

Tortoise in extremis.

Why were we crucified into sex?

Why were we not left rounded off, and finished
 in ourselves,

As we began,

As he certainly began, so perfectly alone?

A far, was-it-audible scream,

Or did it sound on the plasm direct?

Worse than the cry of the new-born,

A scream,
A yell,
A shout,
A pæan,
A death-agony,
A birth-cry,
A submission,
All tiny, tiny, far away, reptile under the first
dawn.

War-cry, triumph, acute-delight, death-scream
reptilian,
Why was the veil torn?

The silken shriek of the soul's torn membrane?
The male soul's membrane
Torn with a shriek half music, half horror.

Crucifixion.

Male tortoise, cleaving behind the hovel-wall of
that dense female,
Mounted and tense, spread-eagle, out-reaching
out of the shell
In tortoise-nakedness,
Long neck, and long vulnerable limbs extruded,

spread-eagle over her house-roof,
And the deep, secret, all-penetrating tail curved
 beneath her walls,
Reaching and gripping tense, more reaching
 anguish in uttermost tension
Till suddenly, in the spasm of coition, tugging
 like a jerking leap, and oh!
Opening its clenched face from his outstretched
 neck
And giving that fragile yell, that scream,
Super-audible,
From his pink, cleft, old-man's mouth,
Giving up the ghost,
Or screaming in Pentecost, receiving the ghost.

His scream, and his moment's subsidence,
The moment of eternal silence,
Yet unreleased, and after the moment, the
sudden, startling jerk of coition, and at once
The inexpressible faint yell--
And so on, till the last plasm of my body was
 melted back
To the primeval rudiments of life, and the secret.

So he tups, and screams
Time after time that frail, torn scream

After each jerk, the longish interval,
The tortoise eternity,
Agelong, reptilian persistence,
Heart-throb, slow heart-throb, persistent for the
next spasm.

I remember, when I was a boy,
I heard the scream of a frog, which was caught
with his foot in the mouth of an up-starting
snake;

I remember when I first heard bull-frogs break
into sound in the spring;

I remember hearing a wild goose out of the throat
of night

Cry loudly, beyond the lake of waters;

I remember the first time, out of a bush in the
darkness, a nightingale's piercing cries and
gurgles startled the depths of my soul;

I remember the scream of a rabbit as I went
through a wood at midnight;

I remember the heifer in her heat, blorting and
blorting through the hours, persistent and
irrepressible;

I remember my first terror hearing the howl of
weird, amorous cats;

I remember the scream of a terrified, injured

horse, the sheet-lightning
And running away from the sound of a woman in
labor, something like an owl whooping,
And listening inwardly to the first bleat of a
lamb,
The first wail of an infant,
And my mother singing to herself,
And the first tenor singing of the passionate
throat of a young collier, who has long since
drunk himself to death,
The first elements of foreign speech
On wild dark lips.

And more than all these,
And less than all these,
This last,
Strange, faint coition yell
Of the male tortoise at extremity,
Tiny from under the very edge of the farthest
far-off horizon of life.

The cross,
The wheel on which our silence first is broken,
Sex, which breaks up our integrity, our single
inviolability, our deep silence
Tearing a cry from us.

Sex, which breaks us into voice, sets us calling
 across the deeps, calling, calling for the
 complement,
Singing, and calling, and singing again, being
 answered, having found.

Torn, to become whole again, after long seeking
 for what is lost,
The same cry from the tortoise as from Christ,
 the Osiris-cry of abandonment,
That which is whole, torn asunder,
That which is in part, finding its whole again
 throughout the universe.