

BROKEN CUP, 2014

"Happiness"

An art, not a right, happiness,
according to the Dalai Lama
(David reads aloud to me)
is not as eluded
as one might think, but clozer
and grip. I wonder
if his screwing up
how words are said
is prologue
to a deeper detour in the neuronal relays . . .
or is it faulty eyesight
as he speeds over the lines
if small print?
Now he looks out the window
at a steady drizzle.
He smiles and calls it
"the seep and slur of rain."
He enjoys
punching out the stressed
syllables as he returns
to reading—
a measure of personal
happiness—happiness
our purpose in life,
not selfish as one might suppose,
although the wish to avoid
unhappiness
may be. And I remember
a friend's sad report:
"He put his urine-soaked
underpants on my face
one night as I slept."
She told me this serenely,
as if the experience
she had with her husband's
dementia would be mine, there
was no stopping it. I said nothing,
only fixed my mind
on the remembered smell
of David's skin—something like
saffron married to a whiff of ripe
pears and worn-out
cotton undershirts. Blindfolded,
I could distinguish David
and find him in a crowd of men,
were I allowed to snuffle
each man's neck and smell
the difference—
and that thought gave me
happiness
as unexpected as was the glimpse of the road
that moved beneath us
as we sped home on a morning
long ago, after
a night of reading each other's
poems aloud, every
blessed one of them,
the road beneath us seen through the rotting-out
porous floor
of the old jeep
as we traveled at the
speed of light,
and nothing, nothing
could slow us down
or keep us
separate from each other
or the road, wherever it took us.