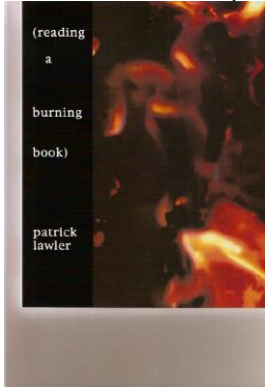


(READING A BURNING BOOK)
(Basfal Books, 1994)



SAMPLE FROM (reading a burning book)

(water)

This is the poem
written with burnt

fingers. This is the
wind inside the
wind turning the
pages of the
burning book.

The daughter sings to fish. The silver brains of fish become the water. The woman stands on the opposite shore playing with her translucent fingers. The puzzle pieces: the twisted coral of the brain or the crystalline knowing flesh. She does not see the man who is watching a body burning on another shore. (See figure 1.)



Figure 1. Photo of light

This is the poem
that remembers
everything. This is
the poem that
remembers
nothing.

Jacque Cousteau says to study a fish you must become a fish. You must spin through the soundless towns, the serious cities beneath the water. You must cruise to the spot where quietly blackness is brewed. Your body must become a language: the fish are made from vowels. (See figure 2.)



Figure 2. Controlling Metaphor

This is the poem
where the self is
murdered. This is
the poem where
the father opens
the door.

The fish at the bottom of the sea: the darkness turns their thoughts to ink. Eyes crushed. The snipe eel waves the flag of its body, surrendering to itself. The hatchet fish wears its costume of scars. The lantern fish, its body swaying, flips past its own light into the clumsy dark. (See figure 3.)



Figure 3. Window

This is the poem
Byron

wrote when he
watched

Keats's body
burning. These are
the words Virginia

Woolf left behind
as her

body drifted
downward with

its death pearls.

Afraid of the greed of the gold brain, the logic machines, the locks of light, dissipation; afraid of the father eyes, lonely and fierce; the suicide poet opens the door of the grave. Water is the only thing inhabitable, at least for the mind. "I am afraid of here," the woman said, and couldn't leave. Sealed off, preserved under water. Stars filling up the ocean. It is possible to imagine all that has to pass through us to be real, to be palatable, to be what is the flaming present. (See figure 4.)



Figure 4. The Door the Father Walks Through

This is the poem
that will float.
This is the poem
that will not float.
This is the will not
to be a poem.

While the body burned and the book burned, Byron went swimming off the shores of Viareggio, far from the scratching at the heart, far from the imaginary cities where imaginary women wear lingerie like butterflies caught in fans, far from the epicurean fruit, the cousin, the countess. As if he swallowed by mistake the breath of a saint, he shed his weight. (See figure 5.)



Figure 5. "I wear another I."

This is the poem
where the father
says he is doing it
for our own good.
This is the poem
where the father
vanishes.

He moved like failure among flowers, effortlessly. He moved like a wedding of acrobats. Then the green water went fat. Flesh was made flesh; he closed his plum-heavy eyes. Transcendence and tragedy: those old themes. Words are not worth it unless they float. (See figure 6.)



Figure 6. Map of the Original World

This is the poem
wrapped in the
skin of a fish. This
is the poem
wearing its words
to a funeral.

The woman stands on the opposite shore. She is remembering the ceremonies of faithlessness. She is remembering the self-possessed. She is remembering how as a child she would curl up in the hole she kept inside herself. She reads her life by the sweetness of the burning body. (See figure 7.)



Figure 7. Children Rising to the Surface

This is the poem
with the hole in it.
This is the poem
we fall through.

The water that shuffles behind is guided back by the burst jewel of the body, the screaming of the bird, the closing book. A little more distance--farther out. We know when it's over: the water stumbles the moment it becomes the shore. (See figure 8.)



Figure 8. The Absent Poet

This is the poem
that cannot be
written. This is
the poem where
you say goodbye
to the self.

Of course, we need to swim through time in order to return to the scene of our origins. Look at Nietzsche, Marx, and Heidegger. Their big burning clocks light the insides of their pockets. (See figure 9.)



Figure 9. Voices of Fish

This is the poem
made of water.
Water is the
dialogue

between earth and
air.

"I never know what to do with the self. I keep writing and it is like removing a dead animal from my heart. And the static tears up the air." "And women are dying inside these beautiful machines men have built for them." "I keep writing and it is like saying, 'C'mon, get up.'" "It is as if I am building my own necessary death out of words." (See figure 10.)



Figure 10. The Evidence

This is the poem
with dream fish
and voices. This is
the poem with a
boy who has lost
his brain.

The flood destroyed all shores, all boundaries. The water entered the houses, the shops. Furniture and lamps drifted. The water seeped into the funeral home; caskets floated past us. We clung to Queequeg's coffin. We died the very same moment we were being born. The fish sewed themselves into the water. The world settled beneath the blue jewel. (See figure 11.)



Figure 11. Around Everything is a Music

This is the world
floating on the
surface of the
poem. These are
the rainpools
women carry
inside them.

Every night Leander swam to the opposite shore to see Hero. He was guided by the torch she set blazing on top of a tower. One stormy night, the light was blown out by the wind and Leander perished. His heart fell through the water like a stone. (See figure 12.)



Figure 12. The Only Way Out of Here

This is the poem
where the star fish
catches fire. This is
the poem a fish
carries in his
brain.

The woman who stands on the opposite shore is ready to dive into the blue heart of the sea, into her own blue remembering, into her own blue imagining. Star fire burns in a star fish. The water is a lung she is falling through. Time-parent. Woman reading the water, reading the fish, eating the dreams of fish. Things that come toward her out of sleep, covered in algae. Dream-parent. (See figure 13.)



Figure 13. The Scene of Our Origins

This is the poem
where the father,
after climbing the
stair with those
terrible footsteps,
dies. This is the
poem the
daughter puts her
hand in. This is
the water she is
reading. This is
the lake like dead
crystal. This is the
mind of a fish.

The woman on the opposite shore carries Keats's burning body like a memory to her window. She lugs it to the tower. Its spools of light unfolding. The light from the burning body spilling on the water like moonbeams, like new breast milk. The sea is the sea because it does not think it is the sea. Flesh-parent. Leander stumbles, chokes on the big gulps of light, touches the heartbeat of fish. Thoughts like silver leaping into her eyes, Hero sees nothing but water and light. The liquid music. The silver brain. Trans-parent. (See figure 14.)



Figure 14. The World