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## Taps for John Paul Jones

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## TAPS FOR JOHN PAUL JONES

You can imagine the boy, just a shy wren  
on some fleshy knee. One day he looked at that knee  
and sent a shiver up it. Good mother, good breasts,  
the boy with sea-level eyes. That year he saw  
his adolescence in a bit of dirt and spat there.  
He knows he will be taken out by fish.  
He never learned to swim.

He is, of course, doomed. There are the photographs,  
there are those indisputable accounts.  
You can see it's not right, the hot day whispering back  
"war" in the ear, a three-cornered blade.  
It must have been that a page had just turned  
and some illegible town spun around with it  
like a strange tail. Or that a gate closed  
on the mystery they would never solve  
in any settlement, ever.

When it's done, there are still two mainlands  
and a few bloodied ships. He hopes they will not dig him up  
in Paris and they do. Sailors file past the tomb  
with their own watery doubts and someone says,  
"leave him to the worms." To look back now  
is to see the sun enter everything like an ocean,  
to find the snail spinning oddly in the delicate boat  
of a paperweight. Bad musk comes from the ground.  
They say it rises up from lead coffins,  
out of alcohol and straw.

So let him wait politely for the flag,  
and leave that tiny spot of blood  
on the button of his shoe. It's too late;  
the widows and their dead, the house full of orphans,  
they're already here. They have gathered in crowds

at the dock and looked in. Too late again, the lid's down.  
Let him wait for the light tap, for the tune.