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Ralph Hamilton

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Ralph Hamilton

The Mother, Broken
A Semi-Cento from Charles Olson & John Berryman

1.
I have had to learn the simplest things last
First you break
Main Street is deserted
The heart is a clock
Grief is fatiguing

2.
I am a vain man
I've never been good at math
or gluing bits back together
I don't know one damn butterfly from another
It shouldn't be hard to believe damage is final
I have strained everything except my ears

3.
When my mother broke I tried (but not too hard)
I am two eyes a pelican of lies
The heart is a cloak
Love me love me love me
The only way I'll ever be whole, milky
and smooth like seaglass
Cling to me and I promise you'll drown

4.
Is being ground into more and more parts, fine
and sharp as sifted sand, democratic
as dust, really the end
How small is this news
I'm only a glass, says the glass: Sometimes
I hold the sea, sometimes the sun,
but never more than this dark wine
Break me