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## Henry on Language Day

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# HENRY ON LANGUAGE DAY

— Patricia Goedicke Prize in Poetry Runner-Up —

Henry in the crocodile's mouth.  
The first thing he remembers is  
his mother's mole. Nipple-  
flexible and dark on her face,  
he would thumb it while nursing.  
When he went from  
no-language to language (the butterflies  
taking shape of b b b b b

B                      B                      B                      B

butter

fly

A

I

R

plaaaaaannee

LEAF

) he raised his arms to the sky and

there grass

met him, Bermuda grass sharp

and stout like a bed

of woven reed.

Closed his eyes and rolled his head into  
language. He scudded on the waves and startled,  
saw face and face and face,  
like the sky was a collage.  
On Language Day, he  
saw that

Crocodile was blackGreen and Alligator pooGreen  
and that Snout kept open the  
window of every car crossing the culvert.

There is no end to the places he was.  
He opened like a lotus into the moments  
and petal petal petaled down the treads.

To Henry on Language Day was revealed: the invasive Asiatic lily, and the  
rot of the child racoon under the deck, and the deathblue vat of a bottle-fly's  
body, and the rusting humdrum of a transformer and its

P        O        P

no, its

B        O        O        M

The bottom-ed out O and how  
most of it could hold as much sound as you could  
zoom in on. Pinch the screen grab  
grab grab, drag and drop,  
the words flying blue, his parents  
and what his mother  
repeated — he put his whole hands  
in her mouth to take them.

Pinch around the tongue  
and in they went, into the world which was  
absolutely his now.  
The mat of sebum under his nails  
when he scratched at his skin,  
the twin roar of planes to the north and  
south landing from east to west  
from places he could name,  
and the new smell of Bufo Toad and the new  
smell of the Name of the wet Stucco, the  
tickytacky Concrete, the torn-off face  
of an urban-rural interface Townhouse.  
The carpet of shell-  
pink Townhomes curling  
at the edges in the brassy dark of Homestead,  
the long lines of Road. And on Language Day,  
he knew what was past was  
as real as what is coming is not.  
He saw the Real coursing through his veins  
cursing through and grabbing  
on the nicks and tabs of mitochondria, those  
alleles that bent to the will of trauma  
so that his mother stopped  
his great grandmother in her  
tracks, stopped  
that matryushka of Egg in Egg  
in Egg with the first spouting of his little fountain  
of vas deferens. If she could  
have a Girl, if she could risk it then maybe —  
but for him now no future, blank old man,  
little body and its slack biceps drooping happy belly.

Open and shut, open and shut. But he was there and  
there and there, scribbled in the water by Light  
as it (the water) sluiced and skinned and chunked  
on and around and off  
an oar of a metal canoe at night and the streaming by of fish and the  
paddle-coast of alligators and he knows  
how warm the water is, he  
knows Warm is not Cold and  
that is that, the  
words fix them there. Are on a switch, not a dimmer,  
and this water is warm. Warm as  
his mouth, as his fish cave  
where he grew, ate  
the placenta like a nibbling Fish.