

**JAY UDALL**

**Because a Fire in My Head**

The leash yanks—a trace, invisible  
messages trailing

I open a book, seeking  
a remembered passage

*as far down the scale of life as the worms and even perhaps  
to the amoebas, we meet a general alertness of animals,  
not directed toward any specific satisfaction, but merely  
exploring what is there; an urge to achieve intellectual control  
over the situations confronting them*

grackles cackle in the bamboo

■

suspended from nothing, pennants  
of breathing white putty hovered  
above our heads, one for each,  
pursuing us wherever we ran  
in the green field—dread

■

when the blood vessel broke in the left brain  
of the neuroscientist, she couldn't say  
where she ended and universe began—  
it was all a matter of energy  
shimmering swim of molecules atoms  
streaming fabric of being belonging  
her tears recalled when she could speak again,  
out of her right mind, trying to explain  
to the hungry brains gathered in the hall  
what she'd seen and touched on the other side

■

*the seeking circuit fires during the search for food,  
not during the final locating and eating of the food.  
it's the search that feels so good*

■  
in a dream I vomit  
living fish—  
the river, somewhere close

■  
words shaping air, stroking skins  
(braided bark, old scar) awake

in the mind flesh flames  
with rustlings of switchgrass,

crow caws, purple starflower  
and fire ants, the quiet cow

come to the killing floor,  
the body a story being

told, untold tongues telling

■  
inside: spin and pull,  
whirled space of muons  
and bosons, weak force, strong force,  
quarks named “strange” and “charm”

dark energy, dark matter

outside: this cosmos  
one among many  
lifeless or haunted  
by life forms, seeking

■  
say nothing  
say no one  
is ever lost  
forever lost  
say what slips  
from saying  
what is said  
by “this leaf”  
or “the rain”  
say the names  
we can’t keep  
what keeps us

■  
absconded gods,  
Ithaka, Eldorado,  
ghosts of appetite—

say emptiness  
is an entrance,  
disorderly ditch  
of pungent mud and slime,  
last year’s tattered cattails,  
new reed blades rising,  
not the singing  
of a golden bird  
on a golden bough,  
but trills and raspy clicks  
of red-winged blackbirds  
in the accidental light