

## Number Six Shot

The black dog swims strongly,  
breaking ice as he goes, smashing  
the dead lilies and the sticks of grass,  
heaving, as if he would come out of his body,  
toward the dying mallard, which he will  
find in a moment, cradled  
in a patch of maidencane, its breast shattered  
by Number Six Remington shot, its black eye  
open under the black softness of the small lid,  
its black beak half open. As we rise  
in the frail bateau,  
having come this long way across the early dark  
of winter into the private world  
of a choked and drowning pond  
on the edge of Wisconsin, where  
the sky sags under the weight of blue battered  
clouds, the story you  
just told about shooting your father  
to death twenty years ago,  
on just such a hunt as this,  
begins to insinuate itself  
into the heart of things, so that for ten seconds  
I forget the strong dog  
and look at your face which has been  
hard a long time now, maybe twenty years,  
and I don't even try  
to tell you anything about  
how difficult life is,  
or about how we have to keep showing up anyway  
or about how there must be a  
reason — I just snap another shell  
into the chamber,

and whistle the dog left  
toward the bird he can't see but will find soon,  
and plunge my free hand  
into the black water,  
up to the elbow,  
as if I might grope the stopper in my fingers  
to drain away the whole scene,  
or casually draw up for you to see  
some ancient trinket still glittering,  
so you might, for a moment, be appeased.