

“Primitive Sand”

How many years had the spring
Bubbled its silver into that tiny pond
At the stream's head?

On the bottom, the sand
Had boiled against itself so long
It was worn soft and slippery as talc.

I was just a boy,
With boy's knees and a boy's head,
But I knew when I knelt

To drink there
How far that posture went back:
I could as well have been

An ape with my ass in the air.
When I rose,
I had the feeling I saw, dimly in shade,

One of the old ones,
The ones of the permanent frown,
Who forded a stream on sharp, primitive sand

To become us.
What a journey they made . . .
What a stream he crossed,

My dappled one, my beginning in time.
I pressed my hand flat against my brow
And then held the palm open toward him.

It was a salute I was sure I owed him,
Even if he couldn't read it,
Even if he wasn't there.