

How Married People Argue

Because they disagreed on nuclear
disarmament, because he'd left
the grass uncut, because she'd spilled
a milkshake on his golfbag,
he raced ten miles faster
than the limit.

 Stiffening,
she scowled for him to stop it.
His answer was to rev it up
to twenty.

 She asked him why
a man of his intelligence would
take out his ill temper on a car?
He shouted in the name of Jesus
that he never ever lost
his damn temper.

 She told him
he was shouting---not to shout---
that shouting was a sign of no
intelligence.

 He asked a backseat
witness totally invisible
to anyone but him why women
had to act like this.

 She muttered,
"Men," as if the word were mouthwash
she was spitting in a sink.

 Arriving
at the party, they postponed the lethal
language they were saving for the kill
and played 'Happily Married.'
Since all the guests were gorging
on chilled shrimp, the fake went
unobserved.

 She found a stranger's
jokes so humorous she almost

choked on her martini.

He demonstrated
for the hostess how she could
improve her backswing.

All the way
home they played 'Married
and so what.'

She frowned as if
the car had a disease.

He steered
like a trainee, heeding all
speed limits to the letter,
whistling "Some Enchanted Evening"
in the wrong key, and laughing
in a language only he could
understand.

At midnight, back
to back in bed, he touched
the tightness of her thigh.

She muttered,
"I'm asleep," as if her permanent address
were sleep.

He rose and roamed
the darkened house, slammed
every door he passed and watched
a prison film with George Raft.
Abed at dawn, he heard
the tears she meant for him
to hear.

He listened and lay still.
Because they both had round-trip
tickets to the past but only
one-way tickets to the future,
he apologized for both of them.
They waited for their lives to happen.
He said the hostess's perfume
was Eau de Turpentine.

She said

the party was a drag---no humor.
Word by word, they wove themselves
in touch again.

Then silence
drew them close as a conspiracy
until whatever never was
the issue turned into the nude
duet that settled everything
until the next time.