

Martha Zweig

Precedent

When Death was a baby—this was before
either here or there had any vicinity or
coming or going had yonder, before
any light, before dark, when time had to tell
itself ignorantly, neither tock
nor wax nor tick nor wane—then Death blinked so

amazed to exist that it thought there must
have been a mistake bigger than Daddy,
and thrummed in its coop; almost it could guess,
by the bazillions, animal, vegetable,
mineral souls staggering in dominion
before it, whinnying, blistered, aghast.

Death was too tiny then to seize even
the first least one, before there even was one.
It swan into its zeal, in the steep urgent
swells of exaltation choked and paddled;
took a great notion—*They'll never hear the end
of me now*—but it grew up to be Death.