**Dickhead** by Tony Hoagland

To whomever taught me the word *dickhead*,  
I owe a debt of thanks.  
It gave me a way of being in the world of men  
when I most needed one,

when I was pale and scrawny,  
naked, goosefleshed  
as a plucked chicken

in a supermarket cooler, a poor  
forked thing stranded in the savage  
universe of puberty, where wild

jockstraps flew across the steamy  
skies of locker rooms,  
and everybody fell down laughing

at jokes I didn’t understand.  
But *dickhead* was a word as dumb  
and democratic as a hammer, an object

you could pick up in your hand,  
and swing,  
saying *dickhead* this and *dickhead* that,

a song that meant the world  
was yours enough at least  
to bang on like a garbage can,

and knowing it, and having that  
beautiful ugliness always  
cocked and loaded in my mind,

protected me and calmed me like a psalm.   
Now I have myself become  
a beautiful ugliness,

and my weakness is a fact  
so well established that  
it makes me calm,

and I am calm enough   
to be grateful for the lives I  
never have to live again;

but I remember all the bad old days  
back in the world of men,  
when everything was serious, mysterious, scary,

hairier and bigger than I was;  
I recall when flesh  
was what I hated, feared

and was excluded from:  
Hardly knowing what I did,  
or what would come of it,

I made a word my friend.