**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.