

TWO POEMS ON THE SAME THEME: for comparison

A motorist reported finding the corpse of a deer blocking the narrow road along a cliff top. Estimating it was a potential hazard to other motorists, s/he decided to remove it, but then discovered that the body contained an unborn fawn. After some consideration s/he pushed the body off the road. The motorist's conscience bothered him/her but s/he knew it had been the right thing to do.

- A. The dark was closing in along the road
That ran the winding length of the steep cliff,
And then the headlights struck against the mass
Of lifeless animal - dark, cold, and stiff.

I clambered anxious out to heave the corpse
That made for danger with such little room
For other cars, but as I pushed I felt
A vital quiver, warmth within the womb.

The mother dead, this unborn tender calf
Would never feel the sun of one spring day.
The problem struck my mind: had I the right
To kill this being - and just to clear the way?

I pushed it off the edge. It seemed I should.
But the rear-light bathed my butcher's hand in blood.

- B. Travelling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching the side brought me the reason -
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purled the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all - my only swerving -
then pushed her over the edge into the river.