

**Roald Hoffmann**

**Basket**

—for *Billie Ruth Sudduth*

to carry  
somewhere  
to someone  
for a good  
reason

to keep  
something  
meant  
to be  
kept  
apart  
safely kept  
for someone

out of  
something  
grown  
but cut  
twisted  
or shaved  
so dead, yet

reborn,  
no,  
trans-  
formed  
in the hands  
of someone  
usually a woman

Roald Hoffmann

shared  
space  
carved  
out of air  
by one  
over  
the other  
under

a construction  
in which  
you  
can have  
a stake  
actually  
you'd better  
have many

a way of life  
where  
upsetting  
is inevitable

where  
the ends  
need  
to be  
concealed  
and the means  
laid  
bare.

stakes  
high  
stakes low  
every basket  
a gamble

along  
a spoke  
out of sight  
(but not of mind)  
tapered  
to be  
hidden

not  
the only  
part of life  
where  
in and out  
out and in  
can  
tire  
some.

where  
loose ends  
are part  
of the plan

and  
entwinement  
flirts  
with  
interpenetration

Roald Hoffmann

the lesson  
of a basket  
Billie Ruth's –  
an elbow  
can make  
a heart.

## Tectonics

### *genesis*

Not God, or Rabbi Loew.  
Today it's just Roald,  
squeezing a ball of clay,  
his small stake in creation.  
Did they begin this way,  
two thumbs  
hesitant in clay? Yes,  
for now  
there is the other,  
a hole  
in the wholly round.

### *he remembers*

He was six;  
June 1944, five Jews  
walking out of hiding  
to the Russian lines,  
the fertile fields  
sodden  
in spring rains,  
no way  
but through the clay,  
his uncles are leaning  
on the women.  
His mother carries him.

*take clay*

A thing with magic  
begs  
to be understood.  
Kaolin and feldspar,  
hydrated  
aluminosilicates,  
layer-like,  
taking up water,  
platelets sliding  
past each other.  
Reversible  
to a point.  
This lesson  
May be of use,  
but who  
will do  
the kneading?

*centrifugal*

in a world  
of seductive  
tugs out,  
and not just  
at the wheel,  
all you can do  
is keep plastic,  
balance,  
and build,  
by hand,  
the higher shape  
within.

*a hand*

of clay is not  
the clay hand  
of a broken idol.  
It's a woman  
in Angola  
reaching out  
with a can of milk;  
it's the hands,  
now two,  
moving nervously,  
of a man  
told his son  
is missing  
in Chechnya.

*subtractive*

so now  
this wet object  
faces me,  
ample evidence  
to being far out  
of the creators'  
league.  
But God  
was into salvage,  
I recall, and  
my teacher says  
there are tools,  
all those fingers,  
a grater,  
a curvy metal disk, and  
this slip slurry.

Roald Hoffmann

Formation  
is as much  
a matter  
of taking off  
as adding on.

*my hands*

on the pot,  
remember, oh,  
how  
they reached out  
for yours,  
hand over hand,  
one spring  
Rio day.

*where*

people were, there  
are shards.  
There is clay  
on my hands,  
there is clay  
in my hair.  
It'll wash off.  
Not the clay  
in my heart.