

What We Owe

Our debts whip through the night
like snakes made of
cash register tapes, in and out,

hissing, then flashing
like a welder's arc
making us forget how to sleep.

We wish they were as simple
as money even if we had some to spare.
Our owing looms with a cold inflation

as the dates of our parents' deaths
turn up again. And we face
those balloon payments

with their compound interest
of hopelessness—why didn't we
say at least once how we truly felt?

What would it have cost?
Our death bed tries were futile,
tongues thick and it was all

too late anyway, those debts
so far past due they had long since
been written off—

but in the dark we know
they're still outstanding.
Even worse there are those near us

whose marrow we've borrowed
for sandwich spreads, whose love
we burn like kindling, whose hearts

we paved over like parking lots.
Those debts wink
their code in our blood,

our pulse throbbing like a VCR's
12 blinking over and over—
IOU, IOU, all night long.