

## Critical Thinking

Today my Iranian student tells me about his sister,  
hanged in her office for her political writings,  
and he says he has no hope for the world regardless  
of what he's learned in my Critical Thinking class,  
though he enjoyed the books we read  
and the film about the life of Buddha.

My student from Afghanistan apologizes  
for the length of her six-page essay  
about her brother, beaten to death  
in Germany by neo-Nazis.  
Then I drive and think about retiring.  
In the traffic before the tunnel,  
a low-rider car screeches past, zaps back in line,  
music booming, and something is tied  
to the bumper—a stuffed toy, donkey or dog?  
The soft thing scrapes along, smacking again  
and again against the concrete, and I think  
of my student's description of the knuckle  
impressions in her brother's *bluish-black* chest  
and of the Taliban cutting off the heads  
of disobedient women and leaving  
their bodies in the soccer stadium.

As I make the last turn toward home,  
past dark waves of mountain, the sky's  
silver beach, wild beauty not ruined yet,  
I think of my quiet student from China  
who asked if I was enlightened, and I said,  
“Not even close.” He seemed so disappointed  
that when we left the classroom and stood  
in the rain while sunlight moved from behind  
the clouds, I said, “Maybe now,”  
and we walked to the parking lot,  
leaning close together, under his umbrella.