

## ADAM'S SHELL

*For Louise*

When we depart a train in the 1950's,  
race for the Biltmore Station,  
bags no shields in sheets of rain,  
you wear a nylon dress that shrinks  
above your knees, pops three buttons at top,  
and right on pavement in a cloudburst  
we sit on our soaked suitcases,  
faces awash with rain and tears,  
to laugh at your wet shrunken dress  
which now exposes a bra cut low,  
not prepared for show and tell.

I learned to distrust your laugh.  
You used it to brush everything off,  
attracting abuse like ants to honey.  
I never forgave you the compromise.  
We argued for the rest of your life.

You are my mother.  
I'm sitting with you as you die,  
mentally graphing the sun's slant  
as it takes all day to move from bottom to top  
across your bed although your eyes are closed  
and you don't know we bathe in sun like we did rain  
at Vanderbilt's train station; nor do you know I talk on and on,  
ramble, really, about nothing, finally, run out of things to say, then  
turn to half-remembered poems from childhood. My last recourse,  
it turned out the best I could have offered:

*"When it was time for show and tell Adam brought a big pink shell.  
He told about the ocean's roar and walking on the sandy shore.  
Then he passed the shell around, we listened to the water sound.  
That's the first time I could hear the wild waves calling in my ear."*

It's the most peaceful day we ever shared.

## Magi

We walked into the woods  
knowing we wouldn't be back.  
We carried the meteorite for its iron, small,  
traveling 40,000 miles an hour  
and four million light years  
to get here,  
a metal detector, the dog Gusto,  
palm fronds. We took palm fronds  
for pooling water, and a key  
    We knew we wouldn't be back

    We took a large key

We walked into the woods  
like hunched monks  
not knowing the way,  
in brown robes with hoods  
that hid our faces.  
In the fullness of time  
it will be our grandchildren's children  
who finally reach the Plain,  
it will be our grandchildren's children  
who dance among the Saracen stones.

You, Soli, who stay:  
You will grow old now,  
settle for life's secondary compensations  
In one hundred years  
it won't matter that you couldn't stop  
patting my face.  
What will matter  
surely as a *bombyx mori* secretes silk  
is the note we nailed to the mailbox post:

*All we know of life we've learned from each other*

AMONG THE FALLEN

For L.

After I died and was laid within the four remaining  
Corinthian columns at twice-burned Old Sheldon Church  
with no roof and the better for it

near nesting hens whose clucks wax and fall day-long  
like sermons neither of us has ever heard  
and therefore is not likely to forget,

It occurred to me this is how *Bombyx Mori*  
speak to one another, that the wrong words  
are not possible since they have no mouths,

that the full straight truth of our attachment  
turns on a language which can carry nothing  
but love and simplicity,

surely as a *Bombyx* secretes silk.

## In the Moon of Popping Trees

When tending it became too much a chore  
for Aunt Bess, she declared the garden  
at Fig Farm a *fractal*, a *thing infinitely  
complex composed of repeated patterns  
which look a mess unless seen from above* .

We left it at that, having no idea  
what she was talking about  
and so the weeds fathered weeds  
and the *arisaema triphyllum* (I like the sound  
*arisaema* makes) sprouted a foot  
from where planted and since Mt. Pisgah  
could no longer be seen from the western deck,  
well why not, we addressed the need to clear-cut  
the tall pines at yard's edge, so spindly  
from their fight to reach the sun.  
One phone call, the deed begun:

two days later, pillage, plunder, and rape,  
trees looking as though they'd been attacked  
with Abraham's sickle sword, bloody business,  
that hacking, especially so for high-tree birds,  
confused and flying blind like bats off cave walls

in search of familial nests, circling well  
above the ground, until one day the ravens  
veered left, headed west, and hawks fol-  
lowed, perhaps guided by fractals toward  
a sky bridge connecting North America to Asia.

Oh, we had Mt. Pisgah back, and Cold Mountain  
and the blue mountain ruffles tumbling into Tennessee,  
but how we missed the birdsong and late-afternoon  
sun in tall trees, quite useless but breathless

and thrilling

## THE SMELL

of today's fresh newspaper

nudges a feeling inside  
and unmined and which I can't name.  
Help me with it:

What do I call childhood,  
sitting on Father's lap  
opening the paper together  
and pulling out the comics?  
Ashes fall on his leather vest  
and his clothes smell of Turkish  
tobacco and the oh, so fine print  
of the paper

as he reads  
*Dagwood Bumstead*  
and *Popeye*  
then walks  
to the second floor  
and down to the first floor  
and out the door,  
gone,  
a hook embedded  
in a fish who can't name it,  
a book handed to someone  
who will only, but swiftly,  
close it.

And how does the fish explain the hook?

*It is like  
swimming  
under the roof of all sadness  
in an old, submerged tabernacle*