

Marie and Vincent (after Van Gogh's painting "The Mulberry Tree")

It could be that this mulberry tree
is low enough for a child to climb
for a fine hiding place
to survey her domain
of far hills and reaching fields.

She might hide from her nurse
who is calling her name,
a wee figure almost gone - past the long fields -
her white apron flies up like a miniature flag.

And so this child becomes part of a branch
so still she is, sitting above
in the tangle of limbs
under cover of leaves
waiting for her friend in their mulberry tree

with his satchel of chinks and charcoal and pens
who sits by the trunk in his wide-brimmed hat
fingering his pastels, ruffling the paper
and slowly, he too, grows quiet and still,
gazing out at the fields and the following hills,
their silent domain.

The afternoon moves along
to the swirl of leaves and buzzing bees,
the soft grit of chalk, the scratch of pen
the heel of his hand blending sky to earth
wind to cloud, branch to leaf
fields and sheltering hills.

The afternoon moves along with the sun
and an occasional shiver of limb and leaf
as mulberries are picked and many are eaten

but most are dropped in a perfect lazy rhythm,
straight down on his wide-brimmed hat.