

RAIDING THE BEES

I went out to gather honey from the hives in the sourwood grove.
Put on my garment of honeybee clothes and packed the smoker full
of burlap.
I thought of Samson on my way to the grove.
His hive inside the lion carcass.
His curse of hair and holy muscle.
I stared at the river when I arrived to steel my nerves.
Lit the rags until they burned, then closed the chimney.
I smoked the threshold bare with a steady cloud
that rose inside the storied chambers.
Cracked the seal of the super's dome and lifted frames
of honeycomb from out of the box.
How many cells filled to the top and sealed with wax for winter meals?
How many quarts of sourwood nectar distilled to gold?
I made a guess as they buzzed around.
No number sticks in the work of hunger.

TO HEAR AND HEAR

The hermit thrush is set for six
to sing his song, as if it were
the end of the world and he was stirred
by dusk to sing the same sweet song
again and again in the understory,
as if to say, it's neither words
nor meaning that matters in the end
but the quality of sound, as if we
were deafened by the sun and needed
his song as a key to unlock our ears,
to hear and hear and understand,
to see and see, knowing that this
one day is the end for now,
which it is, *it is*, he claims, with a song
just loud enough to pierce the woods
until the night descends like a thousand
veils, and then just one.

FROG

My tongue leapt out of my mouth
when I lied to her and hopped away
to the stream below the house.
Mute then, I started to write the truth.
My tongue turned wild in the stream,
for which I was glad and unashamed.
I listen now from my porch to the complex things
it says in the distance about my heart.
How hard it is to tell the truth inside my mouth.
How much it needs to sing in the dark.

SUGARING

You came down to me in the hollow after work.
I was reaping my just desert of overcommitting
myself this March to too many taps. I was resting
for a while on a stump, listening to the steady
drip of sap in the pails. You were dressed
in a skirt and purple blouse, whistling to find me.
I watched you descend through the trees like a goddess,
Diana's sister, perhaps, whoever she was, the one
who lost her modesty. I had ten more gallons to lug
up the hill. "You think each tree is a girl,"
you said. "The way they stream from their holes.
The way they yield themselves." "Yes and no,"
I said. "The way the first drop explodes
from the spout, followed by the second and third,
I thought of boys myself, but if you say girls . . ."
"It could be both," you said, "like Shiva."
I took you in my arms and held you like a tree,
slipped my hand beneath your skirt. I was happy
in my confusion about which was which with regard
to the trees, knowing then as I held you in my palm
and studied the trees that science is wrong
when left to itself. I was seeing with both my eyes
that the world was one behind the guise of leaves.
That the heart of my hand was deep with darkness.