

## CLEAVE

Close to the city, a deer  
leaves a hoofprint  
in our yard. I study it  
under the box elder.  
Speechless lips pressed  
into snow if man was not  
already the beast  
that walks on its mouth.  
I use your being  
on the phone  
to keep it to myself.  
As if too much knowing  
could drive it away.  
The law says  
we owned it while  
it stayed with us—  
what came from woods  
while under wool  
we twitched, pranced  
a circle where next  
solstice it will eat,  
then left us  
for the stream one  
block away.  
When a person says  
*forgive me*  
the please is implied.  
Folding and unfolding  
a slender,  
black-tipped leg  
it widened there  
a small hole in the ice.

## ORNAMENT

The Christmas tree comes down  
but isn't dead yet, doesn't  
drain the quart a day it did  
the week I sawed it  
from its future in the earth,  
but still sips, last cells  
stubborn in a local life.  
Losing needles all the way,  
I haul it bottom first  
through the dining room,  
leaving marks beside  
marks I left last year  
and years before,  
yank yank *yank* it  
out the kitchen door.  
I don't believe in Santa  
but I can't take it to the curb—  
it brought us together  
in honest wonder  
on the couch.  
To leave it upright  
in a drift between  
dangling suet  
and the surveyed line  
I tow it through  
the yard by limbs  
where varnished  
feathers shined.

## THE PAINTED HALL, LASCAUX

Mineral sweat beads patches of the ceiling  
of the *Sistine Chapel of paleolithic*  
*cave art*—calcium carbonate  
crystallized in hexagons  
flint tools couldn't smooth.  
In what depends on art,  
absence must be chosen  
not imposed,  
so the painter put  
the pigment in his mouth—  
manganese, toxic in high  
doses, for black  
and brown, iron oxide  
for red ocher—mixed it,  
bitterer than March grass  
cropped through snow,  
with saliva,  
sent it to the stone  
in tonguey bursts,  
the roughness he covered  
with his own wet self  
chemically identical  
to the bones of what  
his color led him through.

THE CONVERGENCE  
OF THE ANIMALS

is a winter custom here:  
a giant puppet wolf set  
in woods beside the path.  
Its pine frame is padded,  
will hold two humans soon.  
They'll don and walk it east  
to the hard center of a lake,  
dance with other totems  
there—elk, bear, and one  
we haven't seen—come  
from sister compass points.  
Scattering frozen leaves  
and snow the dog  
barks and charges,  
barks and flees a beast  
so intent on destruction  
it won't turn its head.  
We watch from the far  
side of papier-mâché  
haunches set to spring.  
The wolf didn't lunge  
at us when we passed  
but we slipped a little  
near the mouth the way  
couples holding hands  
and roped climbers do.  
(My part is to stumble,  
yours to hold the line.)  
When the leash man

can't soothe the dog,  
he lets himself be led  
back the way he came,  
to safety, but first  
he shows us his and  
we bare our canines.

## NONINVASIVE

Deciding where to put you, we speak of size  
we won't live to see. It's the overhead  
wires we're concerned about.  
We make space by killing what was there  
with poison painted on a welling stump,  
amend the hole with peat when I reach clay.  
That they'll be ready to connect,  
she roughs your roots up,  
the way doubt cultivates us,  
while I hold you by the slow  
persistence of your trunk.  
Like a femur, we install you  
in the dark hip of earth.  
As I appraise your angle  
to a beam and nimbus sky,  
tricks of light afford  
a stranger on the patio,  
looking over here  
when you're full grown.  
I don't envy him but wonder  
what he thinks of what  
he sees—did we achieve  
our woodland paradise?  
Bending low to form  
a raised soil circle for water  
I'll pour each day around you  
for weeks, my hands assume  
that basic shape related to  
but more perfect than applause.