

Ninety-One Years

Going home, I glimpsed a tail light go out;
the rain spoke sparks from side to side,
the drought-dried trees uncrossed no arm,
and I too was unconvinced.

The creek bed arm held silent pools
and wobbling visions
of a bicycle held by a lanky boy,
a tattered sky, and underbrush.
The road met creek
and lost, but where days pass
more often than people,
only the empty afternoons
saw, or thought to see.

A church in France is left alone,
double crossed by time and heat
and Tuesday afternoon. Still,
it wakes as a family stops and crosses
boiling fields to its soft dark door.
Inside is empty, black, and cool.
An orange oval shoots
its stained-glass ray, splits
the dark and dies on
the far-side wall, a single string
of four o'clock light.

After ninety-one years,
my mother's father was a hero, a man who loved
and was loved. Six weeks after he joined his wife
by the roots of an undulating oak,
his house still mumbles of human things
as perhaps it will mumble
when no one remembers. The four of us pack
as Louisiana sun pours down the gutters
and the living room stillness
is as ripe as I remembered. All but us
ignore the boxes which speak too clearly, strewn about
some just filled, some filled
years ago. They stand in crooked lines,
a legion saluting the floor,
the door, the blinds. The attic now
is empty, black, and boiling;
we close it. There's more outside:
more boxes, more heat,
ripe and ready, without
a hint of breaking.