

F. KEITH WAHLE

A Small Town

a small town is unimaginable to me
—the creeks and rock gardens,
apples hanging like bells on the trees

give me Cincinnati, the city that I love
where the air smells like fresh haircuts
and you're never far from a movie

buses go crashing down the street
and the stop signs clang like sloppy anchors
while snowflakes fall around our ears like sparks

The Indian Mound

From on top you might think it's just a hill.
But stand away a little and see how it rises
with no logic out of the landscape, grassy,
with a path up one side where hikers climb.
Some tall, straight beech trees grow around
its side, two or three feet up from the base.
These trees are maybe a hundred years old.
The mound has been here twenty times as long.

These were the Adena people, their burial ground,
who had just begun to make pottery, who made
their tools from bone and flint, and tied
their infants to boards to produce the
favored flattening at the back of their heads.
In their time was the Roman Empire, and in
China, the great Han Dynasty, and wandering
by a sea edge in the Middle East, a man named Jesus.

We sit cross-legged at the top, chatting
with the red-haired girl in the state park uniform.
There are no plans to excavate this site,
and we have no idea how many natives are
laid in the ground we sit on. The sun is out.
Some of the walkers in the group make jokes.
We like this place. It interests us.
Intruders, we can never know how sacred it is.