

Root Fence

Like the wreckage of mastodons
and mammoths, jumbled megatheriums
long unfleshed by time and wind and sun,
their bones heaped helter-skelter in the lurchings
of landscape toward geology,
my neighbor's strange fence—
roots of downed oak, beech, and poplar—
snags shadows in its wild confusions,
chiaroscuro uncertainties
on a simple hill in Ohio.

Nothing like it lines another place
around the county: split-rail, picket,
post-and-wire elsewhere reticulated the land
that wants to drop off toward its ancient sea-floors
but cannot for all their plotted holding.
Instead, shadows straight as chains or rods
benignly lie upon the timothy and oats,
shadows measured, safe as sills.
But the doors that plunge to
darkness throughout the root fence

Will not be entered safely. Humid
passages to regions previous and lost,
where toothed beasts large as sheds
thrust tusks and horns upwards through
a wilderness of soil, open everywhere
along its weed-shagged length.
It leaks a living dusk
more extensive than the night.
moon igniting dim mosaics
of hide, hoof, unblinking eye,
glintings of an old, neanderthalic ice.

But some are drawn to its tangled brooding
on the ridge, find something long forgotten
since the conquest of the land: the
quelling of old demons. Weary
of noon's unceasing brilliance, enslaved
to sunlight's trite productions,
they long for wildness never tamed,
for dark as deep as time,
so pass by here, alone, to glory, quiet,
in a kind of sacred terror, thinking
"It is right sometimes to draw
these things up from the dark,
to haunt the light."