STONES DANCING / *Warren Hall*

The stone slabs of the sidewalk
are large and massy—one after another,
thousands altogether compose the sidewalks
I walk each day. Each slab is singular,
and heavier than a single man can lift.
I've watched men pry them up with bars
and use machines to swing them aside
when a water line must be repaired.
They're slippery when wet, treacherous
when iced; they're catawampous in their beds
from settling crookedly; they're cracked
along their seams, uneven at the joints.
And yet for all their quiddities, the slabs
seem solid and substantial as the town,
the houses with estate security
against whatever shifty variants.

But this one that I've just stepped on
is shifting—like an ice floe, like a raft—
and squishes water out around the edges.
It's not nearly as secure as I'd imagined—
discomforting, in fact, just a little,
to be so easily unstable—fluid—
when I'd thought that I was treading stone.
This happens in the spring, or after a thaw
when the ground gets saturated, so some slabs
lie in water beds, and shift
whenever someone steps on them.
Security becomes a liquid asset.

Then I see watermarks within the stones.
Strata, seams, erosions, pits reveal
the slight accretions that lap by lap
compounded stone. And underneath the bedrock,
there's still the liquid center, that continents
are floating on like crackers in the soup.
They crash and crunch, subsume themselves,
and now and then the magma gushes out
through cracks at edges like these I'm standing by.

Once I watched a mason carve the stones
that would be set to mark my children's graves.
In the underside of each, he set pegs
to fit the notches that he'd cut
into the slab the stones would rest upon.
I asked him why he was doing that.
He said the moon would shift them otherwise.
He said unless he pegged and notched them tight,
the moon would slowly swing the stones around—
stones dancing—a strange affair, it seemed—
like my rocking on this sidewalk slab,
like a boy on a raft in a river, a flow in the sea,
continents, bodies floating free