

## MY GALLERY

in a small shed slanting in the Sticklelyville rain.  
Chickens huddle in its lee,  
their tracks a palimpsest  
through which I see  
fragments of an ancient argument  
rise like spirit writing  
from the slate beneath.

1.

The hired hand of six decades ago  
poses beside his team of mules whose heads  
jostle in amazement. His chest is wider  
than two boxes of kindling; left  
jaw's plumped with twist tobacco,  
his coffin rotted summers before  
my genes rhymed sweetly with matter,

rhymed with matter.

2.

See Grandmaw protecting the raw, anonymous child  
from the knowledge of change.  
Her sun-dark arms are dikes against the second law  
of thermodynamics-their dissolution  
let the dark waters down  
to leach away the red clay of memory. She was  
the first I knew to fall into the roily waters  
where she floats yet, waving a peaceful farewell.  
I see her when I shade my eyes from the sun.

3.

There's Father before  
 the drop-hammer broke his guts  
 & sweat burnt ledges on the puckered skin of his brow.  
 His confidence is painful to behold. And Mother

in a gown that keeps her legs a secret  
 from all eyes, holds his thick arm  
 with a girl's desperation. Where  
 is the angel that will drive them, weeping, forth?

(Its image is traced already in her womb!)

4.

Me at 19: a picture fading  
 faster than I can count.  
 My girth whittled  
 to a boy's hips, I stare out  
 at vast hands holding the cosmic camera  
 thumb poised to press the final button. A stranger  
 to the thrash & sweat of reified desire, I hold  
 the potential of a son  
 in tender vesicles like  
 the knowledge of logarithms  
 in the sluices of my brain. Yes, I boomed

my promise to the ear-like  
 whorl in the muddy pond where the horses sipped their reflections;  
 rattled the future like a black box found in the back seat  
 of an Edsel stripped to its axles;  
 & scratched mash notes to the women in books, but why  
 do I stare off to the left,  
 beyond the boundaries of the picture,  
 the chemical gold of sunset  
 & all the simulacra of a summer day?

Two future brides circle in silence  
one blond & tall as a Kentucky rifle,  
the other short with hair  
like a thicket in a muddy lot.

They'll demand their photographs & they will  
get whole albums to keep in the coming years, but for now  
let this brief fossil lie in light  
like the Archaeopteryx—neither bird nor reptile,  
boy nor man—far from their febrile attentions,  
the easily broken vows,  
the bottles of Jack Daniels—  
far from the cheap wage factory lines  
& idiot fists flashing in bar light

far from every movement made in love or hate  
let this final picture fade  
upon its thorn.