

Margaret Gibson

ARCHAEOLOGY

You who come here, if you come, cannot know how it tasted,
 this hook of dried root—
whether its flesh were ocher, gold, color of wild mustard in a field.
You'll have seen photographs of harvest, if archives last longer
 than houses.
You'll think, whoever lived here had a taste for the holy—here is
 a monk with no hands to fold in prayer,
none to protest the imperial episodes, their wars.
And this—was it a flower? Did the woman (Was there a woman?)
 wear it in her hair,
this blue whorl of a tidal wave and night-blind wind?
You say it may have sprung out of a fetid wetland log—
and in the twisted root of dream, if you still dream, *parasite*
 turns to *paraclete*,
a word pebble as whole as the blue stone earring tumbled in with
 the midden of mussel shells and chips of china.
Who lived here? Ask the corn husk masks. They watched the man
 and woman, like a mist,
drift over the threshold of a door frame that stood, despite everything,
sentinel a while. They let the screen door fall gently to,
they knew where they were going, just down the road, past the bog
 and its stench of mutant frogs,
a rotted sump of skins and carcasses. They knew what it was to lose
 everything. They gave away
their bodies, as the monk his hands. When they prayed—if they prayed,
 and only for the bland
safety of the dead bolt, the comforts of ownership—it was not
 to the wild throb of fire
God is, but to its humbled image. Icon and evidence. These you can store.
There was the skull of a beast hung on the wall, and a tree grew out of
 it, once.