

Bits and Pieces of Our Land / Marvin Bell

One day you will put it together
the way they do the world
in the globe shop.

Meanwhile, you can see:
the compass plant points to the barnswallow
and a piece of prairie

might edge the road. In your mind,
no state bird, no tree,
but finch and sparrow cluster

in willow, ash, or hardwood
here and there; then,
others, elsewhere.

It's not that the land can't
make up its mind
to be a place for grass or bush,

timber or rock. The land thinks
by watching you look around;
in its stopped-down time

it will become what you want it
to be, and then become
all that it wanted you to.

It is something to see:
the way it is turning us over
in your thoughts or mine.

A Goldfinch / Marvin Bell

The Baltimore oriole, seldom an Iowan,
was last thought seen to be bathing

where we took coffee on a sweltering morning
yet in Iowa, a fan failing at our feet.
It was a sign, not of betrayal either.
That yellow breast of hers looked cool
and the white bars on her black wings
returned to us the formal in weather
without shape, shimmer. So a goldfinch.
The mind is a wonder, is my summary.

The Way I Live Now / Naomi Lazard

I know these shadows well,
the darkest corners are familiar.
The bit of light through the blind,
the scent of pomander; this
is my bedroom. You are with me.

I am making a statue of you
out of your own body, commemorating
the precise feeling of the surface
of your skin, your head turning,
the shape of your thighs, your
back and shoulders. Your flesh
keeps dissolving under my hands;
it is striving toward memory,
toward completion which I cannot
reach. I keep forming you again,
out of your own substance, elusive
as the crucial fragment
in a half remembered dream.
The role you play in the process
is as active as mine, you
are straining upward with the effort
to experience your creation.
This is the way you will burst out
of yourself; you never do this.
It is my constant failure.