

FLOYD SKLOOT

*Rendezvous at Auvers, 1873*

Cezanne alone among the stone huts longs  
for light to hold still. He hears the river  
and wind within the chestnut trees as songs  
in discordant keys that come together

with the rustle of distant wheat and all  
he wants to do now is curse high heaven.  
Color swirls before his eyes, thick, a brawl  
of values. He has wandered for seven

hours waiting for Pissarro to arrive  
from Paris, soil blackening, air turning  
ocher, the landscape no longer alive  
along its sage folds. He has been learning

green and gold, the use of blue, softer strokes  
like the caught breath of vision. But he needs  
Pissarro to calm him before rage chokes  
the last hope of brightness. Cezanne concedes

nothing to the sudden cold front or shift  
in shadows, slathering paint in layers  
to approximate morning's sullen drift  
toward blue. Then, like an answer to his prayers,

footsteps through the hillside grasses, the clink  
of wine bottles, a murmur of leather  
easel straps loosened and long sighs like zinc  
white skies the moment they are together.