

On Faith · *Heather McHugh*

They couldn't see the future
for a fact. Imagination
of oatmeal, room of mush,
it wasn't that they hadn't seen
the blackening and ironing
around the lungs, the celebrations
in a raw heart, how the bullets
were put to bed in a chamber.

They just didn't believe
that they themselves could be
knocked off to the nearest star.
They didn't believe what they saw
was gone. The red shift was, at worst,
a dress away at the cleaners.
Invisible ink had to be kept
in bottles, and that took space.
They added attics in the event,
sperm banks in the bomb shelter.

And though the self was always
arriving late, they saw it, at best,
as a friendly ghost, one of the wise men
making a point
of carrying diamonds to stars
or being a shade in the dark.
The substance of the argument was pure
spirit, the drink was drunk, the rock
miraculously gone, and why not,
once you saw it come to life,
live with yourself?

The past was another story, they said.
You couldn't imagine the past.