

The Desire and Pursuit of the Part · *Henri Coulette*

I.

Do you feel yourself somehow one  
With the mute and russet leaf  
And the smoke thereof? Do you?

Back off, then, back off.  
Everything here is all but nothing,  
And nothing here belongs to you:

Not the rain-gray eye rolling,  
Nor the lewd lip canted  
(No, none, November),

Not the old men blowing in their hands,  
Their feet shuffling,  
The axe in the stump,

Nor this one, nor that one,  
For the only one is the one before two,  
Though the wind says O, says one, says ever.

II.

We motored for some nine hours through the countryside,  
Having at least four flats in that time, perhaps five.  
The radiator boiled over again and again.

We saw no one on the way. No one at all.  
That didn't seem strange in the beginning;  
A custom of the country, we thought, to stay hidden.

That was, of course, to ignore our experience  
In the capital, where we had been besieged  
By peddlers with every sort of gee-gaw.

Our eyes, though, were fixed, I would hazard,  
Too intently upon the subtle shift and shade  
Of leaf out of which at any moment, so it seemed,

Butterflies and scorpions might flutter and shudder.  
We had read about these matters and others of such like  
In Professor Baldassarro Bandini's definitive text.

The road was hardly a road at all. We leaned forward,  
Peering through our isinglass goggles, willing  
The road to be there, imagining that it was.

Our tempers became short: expletives, interrupted sentences.  
Tom's knuckles were white on the steering wheel;  
Ned's nails picked at the leather of the map case.

The maps that case contained are of no use to us now  
Stalled here in this small clearing up to our hub-caps  
In the mud—they stir on the ground like old newspapers.

Tom has wandered off. Ned has gone to look for him.  
Is there something going on between them? Something  
Unvoiced or never voiced in my presence?

The sky is metallic, shimmering, copper in color.  
Water drips from the great fronds. The brass headlamps  
Have turned green, and the flying ants are eating the tires.

III.

The whole is not  
Implicit in the part.

The part is simply  
*A part, a division,*

As in the parting  
Of waves, the parting of hair.

Afraid of the crab  
In my gut, and the claw there,

Afraid of the spider  
In my head, and the web spun,

Afraid, afraid . . .  
I get up, cold on the cold

Linoleum,  
And make coffee. Jerome

—O glove of light!—  
Camels his back, purring.

Miss Coots, the color  
Of bone, the color of vein,

Stoops, stiff-kneed,  
To her November garden.

It is enough,  
Enough for the time being.