

Museum of Local History

Amos Throop, citizen of this small
stretch of the glacial underscarp,
I see you scraping through the flattened
underbrush along some creek,
doing your humble "pish" to flush
the catbird from its nest. And there,
cigar-box ornithologist,
you place the smooth, blue-gray shells
in their exact compartment, room,
of odd nostalgias, banjos, teeth,
dust-throttled pelt. In the next room,
a thing someone slithered off
the body of a soldier, son
of the rising sun, a hand-sewn swath
of white cotton, folded inward,
sewn shut, with prayers for his return.
In the new and newly vandalized
public library, an old man
stumbles up the words head first.
I think he wants to read, Amos.
I think he took the river road
down past the dam one time and came
back shamed. I think he looked at all
that corn again and cried. His sons,
what were they, and those stumps thrown
around the yard, the woodchuck in
a heap beside the road. Amos,
I'm sorry, but they've closed forever
Miller's Department Store. No more
tuxedos for the senior prom.
That's "prom" for promenade. That's "no"
for what they seemed to use for fuel.
The coffee here is river run,
partly, the other part a shape
clouds make caromming across grass.

I don't know, but the food here
worries me. The way they lift it
to their mouths. They want something
from it that isn't on the label.
Maybe it's fine, but at the edge
of town, a roller coaster dips
like the flight of some flightless bird,
and though winter is almost done,
it doesn't hide the five stone hammers
in a case someone broke his plow
against. Was that you, Amos, you
pounding down the rows, wondering
what else the limestone might reveal,
what egg the earth might lay, what bird
could fly so far away it stayed?
They had a room, I'm told, for the bones
of their own seeing, a room sewn shut
with pale, late-winter light and dust.
A mother looked behind her once
but didn't see the GI lean
across the sea, untie the ties,
and pull from under the stilled weight
of her son the fiery stitches.
Blunt hammers in a case, winter
breaking up, and mud. The road out
may be the same as the one in,
but you have to face the other way.