

SEMINAR
 (From a Student of the Master Poet)

Knowing how it all hangs on the turn of the lathe,
 on the ordinary wooden phrase, reshaped,
 I try to miter your favor around my small corner,
 nod like leaves in the breeze
 of your observations, answer your questions
 with what I hope won't split or you can't chop.
 Those with stronger timbre
 have already drilled into the heartwood.

I search the forest for perfect pith
 to drop your jaw, make you file me away
 in the gray rings of your core.
 Oh, not near your icons Eliot and Dickinson—
 I aspire to just enough good grain
 to make you consume my unseasoned burl
 with a hunger-- the hunger of trees
 for the company of other trunks and canopies,
 ferment of kindred humus at their roots.

But my pitch bends, my unripe branches
 can't support my heaviness as I cling to them.
 My sentences break mid-stroke, routed
 by polished voices, upended and left dangling
 like stringy participles. My presence
 scatters like pine pollen.

"Who?" you will say a month from now
 should you hear my name. I struggle
 to rivet you with possibilities,
 rummage my tool box for sharpness, find
 my needles too soft and green. But someday,
 long-time hero and two-week summer mentor,

I may yet slip a splinter beneath your nail.