

## Fallow

1

Spring almost gone and the planting still not done.  
This ground under these trees still untilled.  
Inside these crumpled runs of rusty chicken wire  
the wild mustard a kneehigh sunlit yellow haze.

Black widows nest in the water-valve boxes,  
their egg sacs and one-time mates hanging there in the silk.  
Tumbleweed seedlings sprout from thousands of small depressions,  
testimony to last winter's rain and present neglect.

*Lying fallow* they call it, an archaic phrase  
signifying cultivated ground now  
uncultivated, a pallid gray-green  
on a backdrop of browns with hints of local color.

They say not to worry, that any farmer knows  
the fields need a rest now and then, that nature  
knows best how to reinvigorate the land,  
that next year's crop and the next will be better for it.

I don't doubt what they say, having lain fallow myself  
more than once and felt the warmth when a caring hand  
broke through the crusted surface, preparing the seedbed,  
replacing old depleted strains with new stock,

returning me, restoring me, to good tilth.  
I recognize in this that very providence,  
the natural capital gain and unearned income  
all economy depends on, that vast,

fortunate generosity of wilderness  
making good the short-term loans we take out  
in order to raise our little plots of specialty crops.  
Just the same I can't help but feel guilty,

missing already the thrifty growth and plump fruit  
that come only with consistent tending.  
I watch the ants excavating their volcanoes  
and wonder what they'll harvest. I hear the birds, bees

and flies loudly approving this commonwealth of weeds,  
but putting my ear to the unturned ground hear grubs

becoming locusts, blister beetles and more of their kind.

2

Last summer in the shade of this mulberry  
(started from a cutting, watered through each drought,  
pruned and shaped every spring until this one)

I bent the limber branches down and tapped their fruit  
into a wooden bowl until it was more than full,  
ate handful on handful until I was more than full

then stretched up to the highest limb to satisfy  
my sudden lust for that perfectly ripened one  
untouched by the thrashers, quail and mockingbirds

as those before us have for eons, paying  
for our greed with purple fingers lips and tongues  
swelling bellies and hearts thankful that we have lived

long enough to taste the fruits of our labor.  
Called from home this spring to try to find a way  
to speak to men who've spent their lives behind columns

of numbers and marble and military personnel,  
some way to take in hand the uncalloused hands  
of those who though our very lives depend on it

just can't seem to understand how enough is enough,  
opening to the mountains east and west the sky  
north and south, to sun to moon to wind and water

to the living earth beneath our feet I ask  
that this fallow ground bear well provide  
for the wild and store up for my return.