Montana Pastoral

Rick Newby
MONTANA PASTORAL

I have seen fear where the coiled serpent rises.

—J. V. Cunningham

Late afternoon,
I pull off my boots and burn
the slow undersides of boards.
Out a window, young corn wavertwo feet up and I wash the earth
of our garden from my hands:
our garden of the green shoots,
of the mud that slides,
of water and no water, only memory
of a full sluice. I light the lantern
and we gather around this table,
the dogs, a stray child, women and men.
The sun draws us, caught by marigolds,
lodged sharp-edged in honey.
We raise our knives and plunge them
shaft deep. The village priest bleeds,
a yellow stain spreading down his legs.
We moan with him and drive back the hungry dogs.