Netting Bats Near Orizaba

Walter McDonald
NETTING BATS NEAR ORIZABA
—to Dilford

The mammalogist showed us
where to stretch the net so the bats
which swoop down from caves
through this forest path to the river
would impale themselves gill-like,
their radar warning them
even of such thin filaments,

but generations-sure of this corridor
spilling out into millions of mosquitoes
hovering over the river like bait,
they would not believe.

Later, pans scrubbed and dried,
pipes smoked and cleaned and cold,
we lounged in canvas chairs, zipped up our coats,
and watched the stars. The frogs, the frogs,
all down the river brecketing began,
flooding the night with frogs.

Unable to hear wings fluttering,
we felt the wind shift,
thousands of bats beating toward us,
the camp dogs whining, yearning to howl.

The neg sagged with hundreds of bats
wrigthing like larvae in honeycombs,
obsidian eyes glinting at our lanterns,
their hog snouts pink,
wrinkling for breath,
baring their needle tusks.
Counting, we banded each left leg
and let them go.
Next night, only a dozen collided, were banded and released. For two nights more, the net was clean. And then we dropped the net, set up the cameras and red lights. Blindly believing their new map the bats bunched high along the corridor of trees, ignoring the absence of echoes.

Next season we went back, reset the cameras. An hour after dusk the sniffing dogs stood up, began to moan, the air thrumming with bat wings still flying the highest formation under an umbrella of branches, safe from the net in their minds.