

CONKERS

Good for curing what-ails-you
old wives profess. Chestnuts—
she thinks them found coin

jingling in pockets of leaf mulch
of the old stag hunting grounds,
their *Oratoires de la pucelle*. Folly's ruins?

Deer eat them
without harm.
They cure wind in horses.

Serve as weapons for kids.
Placed in corners of rooms
they keep spiders out.

Ripe, their cases split
tumbledown prickly blow-open wedge
gleam of mahogany brown—

like this wife's best view of her husband
(your classic bent over backside bedtime view):
the fork in his trunk,

round touchstones
to heat the pan
of your hand, a trail

of crumbs
to the snow-whitish sheets.

ON THE ROAD TO THE MONT VENTOUX

By evening we reached the foot of the Mont Ventoux

—Petrarch

Pure chance. Say
some fruit left on a cherry tree
along the road
to the trailhead

where you shrugged your pack
off into scruff,
and looked back
towards the village—church

skewed towards a graveyard
calm as a kitchen garden—
folded leeks, a dozen
staked tomato vines.

Say a stranger on the platform
of a station—Avignon, was it?—
with whom you trade
badinage. Nameless small birds

decamp, take their quarrels
up the road—truffle oaks. Cherries,
tiny, wild: pebbles
of memory, like ones

we leave on graves
to remember us by. Not much
flesh on the stones.
But good—*aigrette*—

hereabouts they pick
them, if they pick them,
to distill
a kind of eau de vie—

we'll take a capful
for the trail, this old sheep track
to a summit Petrarch,
with his pockets full

of Augustine's *Confessions*,
also set off one day to climb.

