

John Lane

from THE THREE KINGDOMS

A Prologue

From high spine of uplifted rock breaking down
grain by grain in erosion of years of sunlight
and water
grinding mountains, the old Appalachian range
to hills and hills and hills

from creekbottoms, from laurel draws of old
creek valleys
cut deep in broad-based hills, from eddies
behind granite rocks
from granite rocks exposed by cycles of ebb,
flow, flood, slow deepening of creekbeds,
from soil creep on hillsides

from clay swirling in creeks, red silt settling
in flats, dead oak leaves riding water in autumn
until clogged branches, winter ice
bridging shallows, tulip poplar pollen a scum
on current in spring, a dead queen snake
on a rock in summer breaking down to rot
and body-swell

from the swell of flood, from the
natural flow
of soil to rivers, the thickening of bottomland
the spill and cake of mud, soup of life for alders
and birch
the shallow pools for cricket and chorus frogs

from the twitch and float of butterflies to birch
wild rose, honeysuckle, thistle, heal-all, chicory
and the buzz of blow flies, horse flies in flesh-rot
of dead rabbit, from a moving mass of seed ticks
in deer shit, from the suck and bite of the bulbed
white wood tick on a buck's rump

from the quick whistle of killdeer in high grass
or a calm field rustling with quail, the reed-stripped
neck of bittern, the scree scree of redtail hawk
in a snag, the brag of a kingfisher
after a fish dance with a caught bream

from the blind burrow of a short-tail shrew
the wolf-killed doe beside a laurel-bordered stream
the black bear feast on black berries in mid-summer
the browse of the elk in spring

from these a single human history begins