

Linda Bierds

April

A little wind. One creak from a field crow.
And the plow rips a shallow furrow, hobbles
from guide-stake to guide-stake,
draws its first contour line,
and parallel, its next, next,
then the turn-strips and deadfurrows, the headlands
and buffer lines, until the earth from a crow's vantage
takes the pattern of a fingertip.

And by noon the shadows are gridways: cut soil,
the man on the plow, the plow and simple tail,
each squat on the stretch of slender shade,
black and grid-straight, like the line of anti-light

a screen clicks up to, before its image
swells, deepens. Dark glass
going green, in the shade-darkened room
of a laboratory—it casts a little blush
across the face there, the shoulders and white pocket,
then magnifies the moon-skin of a microbe, then deeper,
electron molecules in a beam so stark it smolders.

The man on the plow fears frost,
its black cancer. The man at the screen
fears the storm an atom renders
on the lattice of a crystal. And heat. And the slick
back-licks of vapor. With luck, with the patience
the invisible nurtures, he will reshape

frost-making microbes, snip frost-hook genes
with a knife of enzymes. And at thirty degrees,
twenty, through seam lines of snap beans, oranges,

almonds, potatoes, no frost will form, no ratchet-bite
of ice, all the buds of transformed microbes
blossoming, reblossoming, like the first flowers.

There is wind at the rim of the black-out shade.
One tick of the focus gears. Another. On a glass plate,
enlarged from nothing to filaments, the lines
of DNA wander, parallel, in tandem,
curled together past pigment blips, resin,
as the contour lines for autumn oranges
swerve in unison past boulder pods. The light

through the mottled skins of genes
is not light at all, but friction, caught and channeled,
like pigment caught in the scratch-marks of caves.
This was our world, the marks say: horse, maize,
vast gods drawn down to a palm print.
Drawn up from nothing the microbes gather,
a little wind on the curtain,
sun on the curtain's faded side, on the crow and plow,
on the earth sketched perfectly to receive it.

Yellow Chambers

Great cells, twenty, forty yards long,
like the masterworks of bees. Each circled a reach
of helium, nitrogen, and the soft-sided
airship lifted.

It was the mole year of war.
On the Oregon coast we found nothing, floating
for days near the plate of our shadow.
Not plane, not ship, some hushed, lumbering
other. And our seascape that winter?
Twin slates and a seam-line.