

apprentices

they spall like chert or flint nodes
slapped with an antler billet,
sharp shards deflected by your leather palm
until the platform facets let you pressure flake
their aspect with your antler tine until
their hidden core is so serrated,
so edged with your inscription and retouched
with their new toolkit after every hunt
that you believe they might wield occam's laser.

// John F. Sherry, Jr.

curse of cane

every time I flail the loaded blackthorn,
it comforts me to think my folk were mad
stick fighters slashing with a beat thrust lunge,
or pivoting to take a backhand swipe
at some slow churl too winded to resist
its tribal memory pulsing in my fist,
its lacquered frets like jimping under thumb,
the swollen knurl connecting with a skull,
a piping and a drumming of old ghosts.
i swing it and it sings out like a scythe
it slaps my palm as hard as a called strike
and grafts me to a clan of angry men.
i seldom use the blackthorn when i walk,
but mostly just to let ancestors talk.

// John F. Sherry, Jr.

gift in kind

pinching in a dented
peppermint tin
of loose tobacco,
coarse papers dampening
in persistent mist,
filters tiny and white,
elusive as pills,
sprinkling bits and shreds
along the dimpled trough, then
roll&lick&seal&twist,
a blur of fingertip
and tongue and wrist,
to bless the sacrifice,
tossing up the offering
atop the table
with a slow smile
and familiar joke
to prolong the round of stout,
warming, the radiance
of friendship beyond debit and credit,
beyond balance,
beyond ante, see and call,
that keeps us all in play.

// John F. Sherry, Jr.

**CALABASH
CADENCÉ
TAISGEADEN**

2016

JOHN F. SHERRY JR. JOHN SCHOUTEN HILARY DOWNEY