

FIRST FATHER

After Poe

Long after the last brick is laid
and mortared, shutting off all light,
I hear him in there
behind the wall, bloody fists
that showed no mercy, humbled
by the weakness of the flesh,
thrumming the darkness,
a gargoye in its crypt
wrapped in wings, limp and useless.
I feel the power rise in me
to put him down for good
but cannot finish the job,
my hand stayed by fear of becoming him.
I leave him in there, walled away
and trembling on last legs, bones
knocking together like sticks,
the sound of scratching.
I relive the scene again and again
to strengthen my resolve,
the woman fallen to her knees,
her voice stopped, her children
witness to the fury, wavering
in the face of a storm.
And what's this I hear splitting negative space?
The jealous shot that wounded the widower
that wounded his daughter that wounded me
as her witness is my witness, her eyes my eyes.
Through all these years I tempered the steel
I now refuse to wield with beserker heat,
yet I cannot bring myself to let him go.

Until today, what I am
is where I've been,
haunted by a phantom playing
Bach in my basement.

Now the door opens
and I look down the stairway
where the naked lightbulb
swings in darkness.
There, can you see?
The bricks have been moved.
Shhhhh! You can hear him
still breathing.