

DAUN MENARI

you can climb to the upper reaches of a river
one leech bite at a time
taking no wasp stings to the ear
since the last time you were hit hard
like a prizefighter's punch
and stumbled back over a tree bridge
slipping, banging bones badly

you were caught in a flood one year
eating mousedeer and tapioca for Thanksgiving
a boy tumbled over in another
lost deep in a pothole bored into rock
circles and cylinders scoured in time
ancient airs locked in the trees
even older skies in the stone

in those upper falls the human litter diminishes
the trail alongside narrows and at times disappears
the trail is even more deceptive than the river
no ups and downs for liquid water
you might like to call it alive

you find forktails and even frogs in the daytime
and hear a hornbill cough
while glimpsing gibbons and macaques and langurs
a viper curls on the fan of a palm right within your reach
these serpents turn up in temples and creation stories
and on those final forest walks when your children are ready to climb
or fall into adulthood and you are beginning to wish for gentle slopes
whether trail or stream

the water folds over the stones
in oppressive tenderness
holding a liquid curve
a palpable wave shaping space
soft enough to touch
to make you want to lie on that fold
convinced it were a pillow

above a pool the water has only begun to saw
down through the rock wall
the trough just off center
the volume of the flow is so noisy
the waterside birds can only be seen

moist little worlds beckon and beguile
soft wet moss covered boulders hide the entrance
to some spiritual cave
you cannot see the entrance
but we know it must be there
where else
with the wind blowing out of some secret dimension
the leaves dancing perfectly in just one spot

it is a place to believe in the spirits of place
a place to start walking back
to keep walking deeper and deeper
into the forest
up the stream
higher and farther until the trail is completely lost
in the jungle and the water and the rocks
and found