

### *Filter fed*

You were baptized not far  
downstream from the place  
we'll go hunting mussels.  
You hunt them all year  
if you can stand the cold.

I learned watching big sisters  
and cousins climb out of the creek,  
their mesh bags full  
of creatures knocking  
against each other, against  
the backs of wet knees.

The things mussels do  
are finished when you dredge them  
up, but you can always  
think about the ones you've left  
behind: encasing blobby  
souls in calcite, sifting silt  
and grit and algal populations  
out, the scum and detritus, the leaf meal.  
They take a thingness struggling  
downstream and scumble the nacre  
for their clung-closed beds  
by ridge, by digested  
rote. They breathe creekwater  
clean enough for water pennies.

You'll have to will the sensitivities  
of palm and fingerpad back  
up your arms to get at them  
through the plushing mud.  
Careful of open beaks that purl  
meniscus fluting on the surface  
of the stream, we'll lean  
down to wet our ears, the sides  
of our faces, with the silt-alerted creek,  
and pull. We'll drag like looking  
for bodies (which we are) and, when  
we find them, straighten and swish mucket,  
spike, or heelsplitter clean to run  
releasing fingertips over the grain.  
Identify endangered species,  
throw them back. It's harder

than you think, telling  
round pigtoe from rough.

In the end, when we have enough,  
we'll cook our catch on a rock  
beside the fire: steaming  
them in their own juices, scraping  
every morsel from the shells.