

III. The Labors of Adam

The sun comes up hot
as soon as it clears the mountain.
Already through the dawn hours from first light
I've labored, turning the soil while it still holds moisture,
digging in manure, leaf compost, calcium.
Now I retreat to the shade of my garden hut
to listen to the quail's sweet recitations
while I sing the psalms and matins of inspired triodion
that watered the ancient deserts.

In the poet St Walafriid's lenten garden
were gathered the blossoms of solitude
which, when they came to miraculous fruit,
bore sweet fulness indescribably descending
like the breeze that comes over the plain in the cool of evening.
He, too, with his hand pulled stinging nettles
that choked the soil by his cell,
obedient to his monastics' contemplative table.
He, with his hand obedient to the rule,
measured and prepared on sacrificed vellum
the illuminated manuscript of his labors,
leaving in quiet lyrics, written in the sweat
of the fountain of miracles in his radiant brow,
a mist that came out of the earth.

Now I return to the hot field-work,
to the exhaustion of my grandfathers laid in the earth,
and the sun goes down
at a more severe angle
to the trees of the level horizon, farther and farther north,
where its last burning minutes are endless
as the prehistoric speech of standing stones.