

Derek Sheffield

The Accretions

I understand that Blake would have us see heaven in a grain of sand, but some days nature must bow before the accretions of our fantastic species.

—from a friend's letter

So that's what the sun has been up to,
prostrating its shining before mine
as I savor the genius of knife and fork
with respect to steak. Every day ending
in a bow, a flattering reminder
to save room for that yellow custard

crème brûlée, that pinnacle
caramelized in Paris as nowhere else.
On the Boulevard of Champions,
bankers dab their lips with cloth napkins,
merci, as the moon lowers herself
before Pepsi and the pyramids,

vanishes entirely at the thought
of airplanes, language, and baseball.
Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows*
deserves a thumbs up. Or should we count
black birds flapping over golden stalks?
Had the postal service delivered your letter

early, say 1973,
and Mother helped me with *accretions*
and *species*, I would have reached for a bag

of army men. Nothing slowed my breath
with such joy as arranging them. The bazooka
man in mud I made with spit

aimed at the standing one, his rifle
butted to shoulder, right eye fixed
on the one lobbing a grenade—
a pattern pure as any stand of trees.
Father was yelling about the credit card,
a door was slamming, and I was kneeling in light

that had split the darkness
to reach my tongue and the sound of guns.
In a far land, men whose green minds
were not plastic were crawling
into the ground, making of their lives
black stems, red blossoms.