The monk (I thought he was a monk),
came through the two-acre grove,
down the path in his brown robe,
cord knotted at his waist.
I saw him from the corner of my eye.
And I might have dropped back
and let him catch up. I might have spoken
but for the warning sign at the head of the path—
the sign that said in tall black:
*Don’t walk after dark alone.*
And in *any* case, I might have spoken—
the night an hour away after all
and him, a monk, and the grove so small
(though hung with shadow and the clamor
of blackbirds in the oaks).
I might have asked him: *What is your life?*
But the dark was coming, and I thought
of other paths, other men, and other warnings—
so the moment went past,
and he followed behind me,
far behind, not walking fast.
And I went on alone
through the bars of the trees
and came out in the light.
And out of my fear, we did not speak.