The Ohio State University Press/The Journal Award in Poetry
Blood Prism

Edward Haworth Hoeppner
for Louie Skipper, thirty-five years
and for Susan, as ever
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1. Memory
Trees We Thought Were Walking

We pried the foot of this one up and
it would creak when the pup was
buried in its blue shoe box then.
_Little criers_, that was us. And
this one, needled,
worked as blinds for the bedroom, so
that you were always under water and
the light came down through water. There
were rooms we couldn’t enter in
the house. There were houses we couldn’t enter on
the street and
streets we couldn’t cross,
neighborhoods of mumbling dead. Louder
voices than the ones we heard.
There was the river, there were
Bluffs and trees—elm and maple, birch and
sycamore, oak and spruce and
pine, basswood, walnut, hickory—to
the edge of both. The water walked though we would not
know much of that. But trees: _The
One to Burst in Flames_, the _Tree of
Snakes_, _Trees that Touched Only in
the Wind_. There was the _Tree with
Doll Faces_, _Three Trees Built
to Hiding_ and the _Five Great Ladder Trees_. With leaves in
our faces—_dust to dust_—we said
what we had seen. There
was the _Tree That Was the
Oldest Thing_, and _Tree to Hold the Hanging Corpse_. I
thought that they could move, said things.
I was wrong. I thought they understood somehow,
somehow suffered with us. But in
patience. I was wrong. I thought they walked
among us, until the blank daylight I
was made to see. I
thought that they were trees, drew
some strength from out the earth where they were
placed, thought
their voices branched out from
their foreheads, they were not human.
II. Politics
Shapes as Prologue in the Tower of London

A great iron hinge, a metal hawk
    splayed into its own shadow
on this door stapled, wood
    it’s hard to tell from stone.
These bulks, stacked, these walls,
    and the chopping block, cupped

a bit, like a hand beneath a child’s face,
    where the young queen set her chin:
chalice: stump. What else to justify
    this mechanism invented?
Hinge: the concept of a pin,
    the concept of an axis;

the finger and the ring; the scepter,
    gold, around which her body,
opened, then was forced to orbit.
    As this door will open, moaning
badly, brute genius. To pivot, then.
    This iron forged, given throat:

    this way into history.
III. Age
Dispatch

Say you’ve come in a stream to the end of the sun.
the children you have sent on, like colored sound,
and you find yourself without them.
they have burned off,
    as fog burns off a valley, heat
    rises off of stones.
how clearly now their faces disappear
inside their faces disappearing:
    daughter to woman, son to man.

say the long hallway had fewer doors,
the long city from which you disembarked,
    like a cloud that leaves the sky,
    was a city empty
    in the hour before dawn,
    with wind that wore its wrappings loosely and birds stare.

say that you have counted joy
    and numbered sorrow.

say that you have lived beyond your calling,
the ground on which you stood is cut away:

    I send you, friend, my greetings.