Adam's Song

Tommy was the first pet I had in Eden,
par'a·keet'' seemed to fit—*small parrot*
with long tail, the color of apple, new leaf,
and lemon; harsh, irritating song.
I called it "screaming" at first, but my softer side
said, "Song, Adam, song."

Eve taught me about *mu'sic*—*a medley*
of sounds and tones, as of the wind.
Cain taught me that some music is hard
to hear: "Father, I have killed Abel
and buried myself in a darker earth
where frozen stars draw black flowers
from my grave." That was a song.

I clipped Tommy's wings that day,
with *scis'sors*—*a cutting instrument, two pivoted blades.*
I gathered the yellow, green, and dark
red shadows in the valley of my palm.
Eve sang a music I could hardly hear.
I inserted one by one into the warm earth of Abel's grave
the cool *feath'ers*—*lighter than flowers, less afraid*
of flying; colorfast and hardened by a harsh song.

—James Richards

This poem won first place in the *BYU Studies* 1999 Poetry Contest.