

Old Language

We canyoned in early, on wheels,
and now have little time, we think;
but sandstone pulses red on all sides
and the town, the business of the town,
trails off like a lost thought.

Here is a place of memory.
A small boat streams and arrows us
in deep where sacred datura seeps
on the shoulders of the water
and a salamander like an icon
bronzes in orange clay, orange light.

At last the boat hushes, slows
and brushes cathedral walls
of the Anasazi and the Fremont,
one of which spirited seven figures
here, imagined them large, draped
them sparely, hammered or blooded
them into life, floated or angled
them in mystery.

We have a few hours here.
Box elder trees tendril the walls,
hanging like unspoken words;
an old wind breathes on the water.
Light flares high on the paintings,
the sun of another near-nighttime,
another arrival back and inward
on the river, in the slickrock,
in the heart of all that is changed
but must not change in this land
that glides us through our deepest dreams.

—Dawn Baker Brimley

Dawn Baker Brimley won second place in the BYU Studies Poetry Contest.