

Adam's Tongue

And here, at last, is what you've all been waiting for,
The tongue of Adam, pink and fleshy, sweet as attar,

Kept behind glass for centuries. And while the world
Raged on it has kept its silent vigil, here chapeled

For all to come and see the first communicant
With God, the Holy Name's first instrument.

What treasure compares to this? Teresa in Avila?
St. Martin's cloak? Or Peter's tongue, with its denials?

And so we have come to keep it here, past the altar
For sacrifice, the stone confessional, the censer-

Smoke rising, here ensconced with the bottles of nard
And the monks' hairshirts, and the funeral cards.

Just how it came to be here is not known, but legend
Has it that Cain returned to see his father's end,

Crept in the night to cut out Adam's tongue and carry
It as a token of his fall; perhaps mere story,

But was Cain surprised by the incorruptibility
Of the tongue, its failure to shrivel, blacken to a tiny

Coal-dark flake of soul? This was still body, *father's*,
Live with every spark of care. Holding it, it dithers.

Here it is, the first of blessers, the first of kissers,
The first of namers, the first of acquiescers.

The cost to look is free, but there is a box to donate,
For those of you whose hands, unlike this tongue, aren't
mute.