

TRACI BRIMHALL

The Orchard of Infinite Pears

On a mountain, we find monks who won't speak
because they cannot bear the way sound travels

and returns. They take us to their cave—genesis-dark
and deep as dream—and there we read their history

by the light of their bodies. The book says: *Myths
invent nothing*. And the book says: *We are all born again*.

And the monks point to a nova pulsing in the eastern sky
when they mean to say: *Creation is a sacred violence*.

When they learned they were ruled by time the way
the sea is ruled by the moon, they came to the wilderness

and buried the cold machinery of clocks, the arms
and wheels and chimes that signified their dying.

They grew an orchard of pears to escape the mysteries,
to take solace in the wonted work of sow and reap.

Here they could feel the heft of a harvest in their pockets,
count seeds and the fruit they bore, and record the measurable world.

But then they cut a pear in half, and halved it again, and again
halved it. They divided it by zero and have not stopped counting,

the trees slivered away by arithmetic. *What is zero,
but an elegy?* we ask. *We are afraid of everything*

we cannot touch, they write, notching bark with a number
that continues unsolved—ordinary and divine and forever.