The Ancient Lute

Who knows why the ancient lute has fifty strings,
each fret a string each string a year of bloom:
that scholar who dreamt at dawn, lost in a butterfly's dream,
that king who gave his heart to the cuckoo's spring song.
Vast seas, moon-brightened: oysters cry pearls.
Blue fields, sun-warmed: jade breathes smoke.
This mood can wait for memory's chase,
still as it comes, still it is lost.

—Li Shang Yin (813 - 858)
(Translated from the Chinese by Susan So)

In Memory of John Thompson

In the afternoon I watch smooth brook stones:
gold, they overshadow the sun.
The rare beauty of things: dark brooks;
and the voices of children, playing.

Where are all our books and stories?
Rest now, silent as a sleeping fly.

I hear your words. Dark, they stir:
petals of a rose, growing from the unseen core.

I'll drop my hook in the water, raise
the great, grey soul, waiting in the shadow of that rock.

—Allan Cooper