In the ho-hum
fence-sitter-beige
meeting-and-eating room,
only after everyone
who had suffered enough –
fallen, altar-called –
came forward and was hand-blessed
by the mother pastor, would the blind
singers go on. With their opening notes,
outside in the pines mockingbirds closed their eyes.
Within, social lighting dimmed in harmony.
The congregation looked to see
if they who never watched their watchers back
showed a secret way of reflecting.
There were ears there who didn’t feel a voice.
But they might draw with the sweep of a foot.

Thirty years ago, I said after encore, I saw you sing.
But we are none of the same boys, he said, defining.

They do not sing anymore. We sing. We are the blind
boys now. And they are because
the shout of Brownlee passed young, the steep pitch
of Woodard slid into sleep. And new
blind hard gospellers came to croon here where
no god ever withheld his jazz
but touched their shoulders
to choose his next hands-up
five glorifying
hymn-powered men.
And women, in alabaster dress,
picked up the next shoutable song:
If not two eyes, two wings.

Note: These are the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi, in a performance in Woodland, California, May 26, 1994.