

## JOHN THE GARDENER

With great broad swipes  
of his big scythe,  
John clears the weeds  
for you and I...

It's then he doth discover that  
*they're black locust shoots—*  
persistent little bastards  
returning *time after time...*

“There's a Plague in the Garden”  
he curses, sweat shaking from his brow,  
fist balling up in rage—*green suckers*  
threatening precious roses...

Twenty feet beyond the fence  
stands the culprit—  
among the tree's white blossoms,  
swarming bees...

*And does not the lumbering bear  
love the leaves of the locust?  
The stealthy fox and scampering squirrel feast  
upon its fruit...(once Biblical food... for so long).*

*Though zig-zag, seemingly “Chinese”  
the locust's branches are still of some use, John,  
providing split rails for the fence  
against which you lean...*

*Beneath the surface, John,  
in the dank soil where you cannot see,  
sprawling roots of the locust  
perk nitrogen for the rose's delicate blush...*

*Again and again, John,  
in ever more  
frightening shapes,  
the plague*

*will continue...*  
Until you sigh  
and say, *Yes*  
*this too.*

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[two notes: in an interview, the poet William Carlos Williams referred to himself as a “black locust,” *i.e.*, no matter how many times his critics “hacked away” at him, he’d shoot right back; the Biblical allusion to the usefulness of the locust comes from the apocryphical tale of both John the Baptist and the Christ having endured the Essene initiation of “40 days in the wilderness” by “eating locusts,” the reference not to insects but to the carob-like fruit native to the Judean desert locust tree/shrub]