

Shell

The crunch of boots on bleached gravel,
I'm looking down, and seeking out a shell,
with a graceful spiral, small, easily taken out
by heavy tread or bird, my own emblem,

to be carried in pocket or rucksack. Shell
strayed from grass or flower stem, shell
of the soil –

not the scallop that marks
the twists and turns of a thousand miles

recalling how in an old century the body
of a saint scallop-encrusted was washed
ashore and came to its final rest – and the
grooves are all the trails we walk, fanning
out to the world –

no, there's still that
smaller shell I seek, with its spiral
curving inward, contained, simple,
reducing down to that small space

we're each allotted in this life,
yet unique, so easily blown by wind
or shattered by boot, and yet perfect,
a moment of being becoming in time

the very building blocks of mountains,
substance of the land that switchbacks
our route – reminding us that our bones
consigned beneath the earth
will rise again