The Abalone Shell

No chambered nautilus, this; rough algal beard
on bark of an inverted bowl outside;
unpretentious, simple, plain, with tiered
holes joining its life with sea and tide.

They pried it loose from its foundational rock
and tore the living from the shell it grew,
consumed its flesh with light convivial talk
as all of us who know not what we do.

Now resurrected on a mantelpiece,
the shell lies open in a single whorl
bearing its holes of living without cease
above the iridescent mother-of-pearl.

—A. Sherman Christensen