

LINDA SILLITOE

## THESE ARE THE SEVERELY RETARDED

Leaves of a different cut,  
perceiving other winds,  
the children blow in spring  
and laugh aloud like children.

Smiling, Sheila rocks forever,  
flings her fluttering birds like hands  
to pattern the winds before her.  
Angela returns a stranger smile  
as her palms mold a phrase in the air.

Choo-choo-the-big-train-is-coming-  
down-the-track. . . .  
The children shove the train with effort-words,  
half shouting like children, elbows round the wheels.

If you cannot touch them, they will touch you.

The little girl who grins  
at her fingers all day — will we teach her  
colors and to grow beneath her bangs?  
Leaves of this tree cannot think crimson  
as the autumn hillside ripens.  
Jerry is the worker around this place,  
he says, and smiles the wastebaskets  
out the door, bruising the corridor walls.  
Ask him — he can tell you he is twenty-one.

Leaves of a different cut  
with once-twisted stems,  
shake endangered in a March wind laughing,  
held reversed in an ever-greener spring.