

# FIREWEED POEMS

*51 mostly longer narrative poems*

CLIFF CREGO



*There is a flower  
that does not fade,  
it's not in heaven,  
not made of jade;*

*It's a flower  
which roots in love,  
with rainbow petals  
in the sky above.*



# Part I

*strophe*: an order of movement which articulates itself into stanzas—or groupings or clusters—of an irregular number of lines of irregular length; alternatively, in the original Greek meaning, a complementary back and forth between the two sides of an orchestra.

*katastrophe*: the conflicting orders of movement of degenerative chaos and disaster; alternatively, in the original Greek meaning, “the return to a point of rest and axial equilibrium of a lyre string after it has ceased to vibrate,” and is, therefore, once again in a state of neutrality.



# White Oak

The sound of a farmer knocking  
on the wood of his kitchen table . . .  
you can hear the fact that the truth  
of love is never lost.

Physical things,  
some precious,  
some more like habit,  
come and go,

but the sound of knuckles on worn wood  
somehow remains the same. His grandfather  
made it, his father made it, and knowing  
full well his wife no longer hears it,  
and that neighbors in houses  
standing in fields they once farmed  
together do not care to hear it,  
he makes it now alone. Then he stops, listening,  
looking down into his morning coffee.

His father used to tell him the story  
of how, when the settlers first  
came here to clear and plough the land,  
what enchanted the natives most  
was the taste of their sugar.

As a boy, he always  
wondered by what sound,

by what word, they would  
have called it?

The sound of voices . . .  
Thank god for radio. The price  
of soybeans and corn.

*White oak.* The straight, tight  
grain of long, dry summers. Black  
worm holes that a man of words might  
ponder. All the polish of work  
that breathes, folding into the rich fields  
of the present moment.

He touches the wood,  
still hearing his grandfather's voice  
preaching to his father,

*"Even God's gotta have a stick with two sides."*

They were talking about the government,  
then. War. Freedom. Money.

Some things are always the same.

Taking the metal cup off  
the cooking stove, spirits  
rising with the smell of boiling  
black coffee, he shakes his head  
and asks out loud of himself,



*“When the cup is broke  
and no more use, where  
does the circle go?”*

He can still hear them laugh . . .

That’s how they talked.

*“Sweets are always the first thing missed  
and the last to be forgotten.”*

## Love Grass

A spray of amethyst,  
more texture than flower.

When one finally sees it, one  
asks,

*“Why hadn’t he seen this before?”*

An unvoiced purple whisper trailing along  
the deep greens of a well-kept path, looking  
for signs,

*“Which way could she have gone?”*

Is it possible that even this tracery of joy must  
wither and let go, finding no solace  
in the irregular breath and tumble  
of the coming winds?

## **A Mallow of Wet Places**

Sharp-toothed calyx,  
the sheath which protects  
the ripening petal's rosy pink.

Which flower might  
open today?

To what heavenly bodies  
might it align itself?

The cattails do not seem  
to ask, but stand their ground,  
tall, straight, erect blades.

# Sandbur

Continuous blessing,  
feet moving lightly, swiftly,  
over soft, yielding earth,

skin of soles reading  
texture like eyes touching

the storylines seen in the bark  
of many trees.

The simple thought of something sharp,  
painful, these possible futures hidden  
in the hard brown of dried grass.

Oh so careful child...  
Don't let it take away this joy.

# Crabgrass

4 or 5 digits—the splayed fingers  
of an outstretched hand,

driven to the peripherique of tightly  
cropped, well-fed urban meadows . . .

How the violets, moss and yellow flowers  
of spring wish to return, showing us

that someone has given up all the fighting  
and let their hair go wild again, gestures

shaped, even if ever so slightly,  
by much sun, sparse rain, and the curious,  
fickle ways of a prairie wind.

# Omphalos

*They released two golden eagles  
from the far corners of the Earth  
and knew that, where they would  
come together and touch wings,  
there, they would find the center  
of their world.*

Sometime, after the performance is  
over, lean your ear carefully against  
the wall of the concert hall and let it  
speak to you. It is possible that  
the wood holds within itself

the countless subtle movements of all past  
performances, all sounding together at  
once, as silent echoes within echoes  
within echoes;

Perhaps it is this resonance of the past  
that reaches out to touch  
and inform the present moment.

*Space . . .*

The silence of the  
blank page from which  
the sound of words  
emerges,

*Space . . .*

The violin on the table,  
not yet tuned,  
but we already sense  
the almost manifest  
shape of all past and  
future concerti.

A child might touch it  
and hear the wind moving  
through the crowns  
of trees in a distant forest.

Forest. Wood.  
*Space.*

The master carpenter travels  
with his two young apprentices  
from village to village; they  
go on foot and are welcomed  
everywhere; with luck, they  
will help you build your home;  
it will last a thousand years.  
Wood. Forest.

*Space.*

But where shall we place it?

The mark of the omphalos.

We see it even at a great distance.  
Erect, standing straight up into the air,  
artifact of a proud geometry.

What was here before this city was built?  
Does it always begin with the placement  
of but a single stone?

*...terra, ....omnes terra,  
in exultatione.....  
...terra.....*

Surely, the river remembers,  
and perhaps the older, solitary trees,  
placed and planted by others long ago,  
ask the same question. You see it in

the way their powerful branches  
weave themselves into the surrounding  
air and protect it,

and offer us sanctuary.

Let us go then together,  
slowly, hesitantly,  
from tree to tree,  
you and I,  
from tree to tree,  
crossing swiftly fences and wires,  
and wide, noisy, dangerous  
roads...



Surreal city,  
we pause, and listen  
to the sound...

From a distance,

The mark of the omphalos.

Artifacts of ruler, triangle  
and square,

nets, grids thrust out upon the world,  
bold gestures cut in stone.

*in exultatione.....*  
*....omnes terra,*

Unreal city. Unreal.

*Space.*

The orchestra of strings stops,  
to tune and tune again,  
sensing the hushed sway  
of trunks in a distant...

*Space.*

Where we shall place our man  
of stones to mark where others  
have gone before us,

and who have disappeared,  
in this city.

Mark of the omphalos.

Not a monument, no supernaturally  
proportioned horse  
or poet or military man,

but a dream...

Surreal city.

Of many who rose to speak  
as one of freedom and great urgency,  
and at that moment the sound  
of all creation passed  
through their voice.

....Unreal city...

Long before, the ancients  
knew that the images  
of gods could never be  
brought down to earth.  
*...omnes terra.....*  
exulted.

We stand,  
on a bridge,  
above a highway,

all highways,

together,

listening

to that sound,

One breath of the bow,  
and the symphony sounds out  
in voices of pure silver and glass,

*...et in secula saeculorum.....*

but a dream,

— city...

.....but a dream.....



# Part II

## Mountain Path

As two learn to walk  
together as one,

one of their most primal of fears  
is that they might somehow,

by some accident, be separated—  
perhaps irreversibly.

That is why Love seeks to protect  
every step Freedom makes.



# Little Stone Man

*a poem in rounds*

Slowly, rock by rock, feet searching for a route through  
the fractured byways of a vast boulder field.

The feeling of being lost mixes with mist, the body  
shot full of holes, energy pouring out every which  
way, any direction as good as the next.

But one moves on, all the same...

In the distance, a little stone man,  
just a pile of rocks five feet tall.

But he's waving! He's smiling!

Silent gestures which give one courage,  
the whisper of a smooth, comforting voice,

*"You're not lost, keep going!  
This is the right way."*

Keep going!

\* \* \* \* \*

*A blaze, a cairn, a metal board,  
signs of those who have gone before me,  
sounds of front doors firmly snapped shut,  
echoing in the forest at night.*

In the forest,  
the mark of an axe, the wood,  
the wound, the trust of trees,  
of threads tied, trunks, wombs,  
of rocks, of constancy,

...the quiet centers  
around which turn  
the gift of our returning...

Returning.....

Day-old bootprints in a single row,  
a track, a trail, a muddy road,

So much of my now walks on their past,  
but how quickly my feet beat their work dumb,  
the dulling drone of mechanical drums.

My free, easy rambling  
is their hard labor;  
my sure step, their fatigue,  
their turning back...

But one moves on, all the same...

And everywhere these deafening sounds,  
of d r u m s, heavy d r u m s, beating the bounds.



So tell me please,  
pathmaker past,  
“*Where is the unknown  
now?*”

\* \* \* \* \*

**G***laciers, ridges and rivers without end,*  
these differences, black on white.

A line, a color, a printed page.  
A map’s measure of the Earth’s music  
or a madman’s dictation?

The sure and certain knowledge that  
others have been there before me.  
Oh yes, the world is round!  
(What a marvelous returning!)

A child draws the hands of a clock  
such seriousness,  
five, eight minutes pass.

But her face,  
  
so full of frustration, surprise,  
seeing what’s written  
belongs to the past.

Belongs to the past,  
But one keeps going, all the same...

And everywhere, echoing,  
these deafening sounds, beating the bounds,  
of d r u m s, heavy d r u m s, beating the bounds.

So tell me please,  
mapmaker past,  
*“Where is the unknown  
now?”*

\* \* \* \* \*

*A letter, a word,  
a sound, a phrase.*

Meter, matrix, mother of all,  
tell me, tell me please.

Where to with this need to be lost?  
Where can this little girl build her

man of stones?

To mark that place where  
maps have dragons and  
trails have tails wrapping  
round themselves,

where all is fire,  
motionless,  
ablaze,  
no sound,  
no sign,  
steady light.



# Part III

## **Without**

A world without light or  
sound is thinkable,

but not a world

without

movement.



## Four Romances

(1)

Tuning:—it  
was as if a light

were carried slowly,  
in a measured way,  
from player to player  
to player,

a light passed on from the very first,  
the original, of all earth-bound fires.

Bright star burning,  
not without passion,  
not without ash.

(2)

It was the beauty  
of the writing,—the  
proportioning on the page,  
that intrigued the scholars most.

They had only fragments, but  
they had to be poems, dozens  
of them, that much they knew,  
they had to be.

They would count the letters, and  
what appeared to be the breaks between  
the words on a page. Patterns emerged.  
And theories concerning meaning  
were proposed and circulated.

And yet, it was the rhythm—the sound  
of the words—we mustn't forget:  
they had to be poems, that much  
they knew—that remained a mystery.

As time passed on, the character of this  
absent sound, of its spirit it could be said,  
became a source not of clarity but rather  
of great confusion to them, finding no  
proper place in their lexicon of ancient  
knowledge, in their hypothesised *ars poetica*.

And so at once they did, and yet did not,  
notice that something was missing in their



rooms filled with learned yet  
strangely mute—one could  
almost say—disembodied,

conjectures.

(3)

On the podium, a man  
professed that a pipe of crude  
concrete made the same sound  
as a flute made of gold; that, indeed,  
*“Sirs—a vibrating column of air  
is a vibrating column of air.”*

Listening, the young woman felt  
such a rage well up within her that  
she wanted to run up and gouge  
out his eyes.

But then she thought,

*“No— “*

She would have her chance  
to demonstrate the truth  
of her sound,

although she knew that few  
among them would care to listen.

(4)

No one had taught her  
how to tune the strings.  
She simply knew. Without  
knowing why, she sensed that,

beneath each sounding string  
there lay a band of silent  
sound as big as the world itself.

She would turn the pegs  
until the precise moment a  
string touched this source  
and was illumined by it.

And this she thought was love, as  
big as the world itself, and yet,  
so intimate and small she could  
hold it in her hands.

And still she knew that, if  
she were to hold it too tightly,  
as hers and hers alone—

that this sound, no matter  
how hard she might try, would lose  
all its beauty, and that she would have  
to stop and learn to tune again.

# Mystery Flower

It was simply there,  
waiting almost,  
in an abandoned field.

There were roads nearby.  
And a noise that made them  
uneasy about lingering too long.

They had all come to study it. And  
debate its form, origin,  
next of kin.

There was the problem of a name.  
And proper epithets. And, of course,  
there was the issue of a specimen.

Should they risk transplanting it?  
Or would a leaf be enough? No, they  
all knew, although not one of them

dared say it out loud:—They must have  
a flower. Yes: a single, whole, flower.

That is how they found them. All standing  
stones frozen in a circle about a mysterious,  
empty center. Outstretched hands gesturing  
to the heavens,

—eyes closed,  
mouths,  
still fully opened.

# Two Little Poems about Nothing

## (1) Zero

Zero,  
such a shy performer,  
at first hiding behind the no's "n",  
you step out onto the clear, open page;

0,

inside your tight boundaries lies amazing space,  
the mouth of a bottomless well dropping down into  
the dark waters of unknown significance,  
where absence is not naught and a mere  
nothing adds more to the already full.

Cipher of silence, swollen round with fresh beginnings,  
of curtains about to open, the choir's first breath... . . .

Origin of origins which comes forever before  
the sound which can never be played.

## **(2) No Reply**

.....This waiting for that which does not come,  
perhaps, *will* not come.....rings left in-  
complete.....

The paper which remains blank after so  
many years, turned yellow and dry,  
still thirsty for rain;

The book left half-read, whole shelves  
full of dust and desire;

The ardent letter which finds no reply,  
a hole burnt open in nothing;

.....The song spreads its wings and waits for warm air,  
and wait it must, for in a room without echoes  
we quickly stop our play.....





# Part IV

## *Mirrors*

## A Die Falls . . .

A die falls.  
The sharp sound of plastic and wood  
meeting the  
table's hard  
surface.  
Unpredictable,  
each event isolated by  
a lack

of relationship,  
not tied to a past. The die has  
no purpose, no direction,  
just steps in a disconnected chain,  
each moment unaware of the  
next.

Though thought cannot for-  
see which number will face up as  
the die comes to rest,  
it does see pattern,  
a shape to the movement.

The dance as  
a whole has order,  
perhaps not  
the design of a governing mind,  
but predictable all the  
same.

Isn't it strange?  
Randomness repeated does  
not look like  
accident.  
Rather,  
it gives one a sense  
of an intelligence near by.  
Is that

what they had in mind  
in laying the two sides of a  
split marble slab, one next to the  
other, the intricate weave of  
the dragon veins, left the reverse of  
right?

These patterns in two's  
bring us somehow closer to home.  
The die comes to rest  
on a '3'  
but we need a '2' since one of

any thing  
makes no difference,

makes no place  
for our butterfly, waiting so  
patiently till now, to spread its  
wings.

## Procrastination . . .

How strange, this agonistic split  
between two conflicting voices;  
one, a relentless conductor,  
the other,  
a dreamer and somewhat lazy.

One will have me write  
that letter  
(so long overdue),  
not allowing any holding  
back.

The soft one, however, likes to  
wait, preferring to  
defer—  
*“Tomorrow will do just as well...”*  
Sometimes I wonder  
which one is really  
me, or is  
‘me’

something more  
like friction, an endless loop of  
*“yes”* and *“no’s”*  
grinding  
round and around in runaway?

Day is the realm of the easy-  
going-put-off, while conductors  
come out at night to rehearse their  
“should-have-dones.”  
“*You didn’t write today,*” he shouts,

as I pretend to  
sleep, he keeps  
rolling me over and over,  
prodding me with his  
stick.

Surely, time is in the turning,  
a loop tied into  
a knot  
which grows heavy with tomorrows...  
Sometimes I wonder  
if I could break the  
circle, or  
is

that just more  
delaying, more contradictions  
between two

voices,  
strict by night and put off by day?

# Pianoforte . . . *for Edgar Varèse*

Pythagoras's harp  
now lies mute  
on its  
side,  
covered with the wood  
of a black forest.

Three teutonic legs stand firmly.  
What a difference! This step by  
step movement from soft  
to loud and  
back a-  
gain,  
abrupt shifts now accompanied  
by the subtle fruits  
  
of mechanical  
invention.

Recalcitrant leaps of five scaled  
down by  
the overwhelming  
power of ten, hands walking the  
threads of an ancient  
loom strung tightly with the rough cords  
of a black and white  
weave. Whether strings or  
  
snares, an astounding  
tool, pure space!  
For time sits lightly on a four-  
legged stool  
of inter-  
national design.

Striking, these orders  
of the mind,  
of thought  
made  
manifest, a danc-  
ing chorus held in

the hand or a hand holding us?  
What's the difference? A neutral,  
eternal instru-  
ment? Quite doubt-  
ful. More  
like  
a light in the dark having for-  
gotten that it's just

a light and  
not the sun.

Of course, what could we display at  
all with-  
out measure, without  
a bed to hold the stream, a smooth  
surface for the cream-  
like shades of the moon is the key,  
the key to these dark  
spaces behind the

brilliance of Mozart's  
smile, an un-  
known place where the birds go in winter,  
flying through  
endless skies,  
sure wings, silent breath.

## Mirrors . . .

Some days, I  
look in the mirror  
seeing more gray hairs than brown, yet

today,

the color of youth  
seems to speak to me more clearly.



**H**ow thought plays  
tricks, pushing me back  
and forth like a bike in the wind;

one day,

it gives me wings, then,  
friend turned to foe, my wheels are stones.



# Part V

*Roads Without End*  
*A North American*  
*Triptych*



# Roads Without End

*for Jackie and her owls*

From the  
brush of a clear cut,

two bright  
eyes leap out at you  
and disappear into the night  
like images of  
some treeless future  
flaring up out of the tangled  
undergrowth  
of destructions past.

In such  
darkness,

the rattling  
of the empty truck  
seems almost hushed, somehow muted,

headlights cutting a  
straight line path  
down logging roads that know no end.  
An echo in the  
forest at night, like no other

sound.

The air of the empty spaces  
between the trunks of  
giant trees  
resonates  
in stillness  
like the deep darkness  
between distant stars. But this is  
no echo.

A woman calls out  
and calls out  
again, three sounds each followed  
by a slide into silence.

And a  
bird replies.

This has happened before, but each  
time she stands breathless,  
this most primal of dialogues,  
two beings no longer alone  
in the world.

The flashlight's beam, the  
illumination  
of which it has no need, the head  
slowly turning to  
the left.

But the  
eyes—so dark, so utterly motionless.

The woman suddenly senses  
how strange this is...  
She has come to help but is not  
at home here, her movements somehow  
out of tune  
with the presence that looks  
down on her  
from the snag above.

She so wants to help,  
to carry this bird in her arms  
to some safe place, far  
away from the smell of diesel  
and the ripping, greedy sounds of

saws.

But the  
bird says no,

as if it somehow understood  
and sensed what was to come.  
The woman checks her watch and marks  
a map, turns  
and walks steeply down

into a thousand  
years of patient growth,  
and into  
the persistent, echoing howl  
of a

bird and  
the sadness of its

un-

neces-  
sary,

ir-

rever-  
sible

loss.

*(Flat Bottom Valley,  
Mount Adams Wilderness,  
Washington, USA,  
summer of 1989)*



# Hamadryad

It begins.  
A map, a line, a  
road is built.

One tree falls,  
a cascade follows,  
slopes left naked in the wind.

Look alike seedlings  
in row after row, a handful  
of pennies  
for fifty  
tons lost.

...This necessary a-  
symmetry...

A saw's steady journey into  
the tree's  
distant past,  
a year of growth cut  
away in a second or two.  
A man looks—  
that moment of hesitation  
as the great

fall begins . . .  
First silent, a holding of the

breath, then

the air splitting on  
either  
side, two huge waves, the  
swell, the crash.  
Even the hand holding the saw

is brought down  
to  
earth.

Such a  
dilemma,

this need of  
wood, this need  
of trees.

But need we be  
the one who cuts the  
weave?

Single trees  
are not the forest  
as separate sounds  
make no great passion.  
Where does the music  
go?

Have you not heard the  
tree-spirit sing  
through the wood of the  
oboe, the  
violin?

These gifts of  
the forest  
which are made to last.

But I play my song  
on a broken  
violin,  
the crass and scratchy sound which  
suffering

makes.

I *am* the naked slope, cut clear  
of trees,  
torn open  
with a muddy road.  
But how can I resist the saw

when the saw  
is  
me?

# Concord, MA

*(Walden Pond)*

*for Henry David Thoreau*

In America stands a house,  
simple, rough hewn, like  
a song which speaks eloquently  
of important  
things  
with  
words  
from everyday life.  
Just one room, it is made of wood,

with high glass windows on either  
side, a place where the movement of  
light could be studied  
and known well.

*“A melody, as it were,  
imported into the wilderness.”*

A door,  
a bed,  
a table,  
a cooking stove of

black cast iron, a hearth made of stones.  
And there's a wooden traverso

lying on the bed. Did he play?  
What kind of sound would  
a flute make in such a house?  
Would he play  
with the door open?

Clearly, this is a house in which  
one must play  
alone, sit and watch  
the winter fire and the spring  
ice crack, break up and begin to  
flow. This is a house  
where the necessary has been

patiently  
mined from  
the superfluous  
like a rock that comes out of the  
earth whole, not in need of any polish.

His life was this work.  
The rock, the word, the life were all  
one,  
indivisible,  
and that is so rare.

*“A vibration of the universal lyre,”*

This is what you've lost,  
America...

The rocket's red glare  
has entered your heart's  
house and burst  
it apart.

What remains  
is a  
shoddy shack.

Torn away from the  
shores  
which gave  
so much life,  
a derelict now on display.

You have gouged holes  
in the Earth at the edge of his song.  
Do you still remember the words?  
Something  
about....?

Yes...

In Concord is no  
harmony, America, don't  
you hear? No future.  
Grave proof through this night  
that our heart is not there?







# Part VI

## *On the Wayside*



# Wanderer

Moving,  
always moving, and

living inside movement. Not the  
artful, cyclic, back  
and forth  
of the migratory birds, but  
more the  
discrete  
stammer  
of a tongue finding its way down

the tangled  
streets of peregrine  
words;

Not

the fountain's smooth, continuous,  
laminar flow, nor  
the fractal exuberance of  
white water,  
but a broken movement of stops and starts,  
our passageway to the wayside,  
to the  
travail of

these necessary crossings  
of arbitrary borders...

Light. Easy.  
Taking refuge among the trees.

The rhythm, of cautious walking,  
a weaving  
together  
of the unfamiliar and half-  
forgotten,  
picking up songs as we go like  
so many seeds  
moving from home to

home on  
the fur of our pants.

# The Color Black

*for raven*

The raucous sounds of birds burned  
black with rage,  
banished forever  
to a cage  
with fear for bars, victims of  
their own inauspicious presence  
on battlefields past.

Waiting.  
Sensing what

was to come.  
The smell of rotting

flesh. (Did they know who was to die?)  
Ah, but this unbearable silence  
filled with  
thought's ravenous flies  
biting at the brain's tender meat.

Such a bird  
is no friend.

But who is lacking in light? Is no  
rapprochement possible? Do we  
not feel for  
this creature

whose wings  
must fly through  
skies  
clouded with  
death's image?

See the clarity of their calm  
indifference.

Soaring quietly now from  
their high place of safety, a day-  
time

witness

to our ancient dread of night.

## Street Dogs

Two small dogs without  
a domain, the open street a  
home. No hard walls, no  
master,  
nothing to protect.

A duo barking  
on dog star days, the music last-  
ing till deep into the summer night.  
Our w a s t e is their joy, their freedom,  
our neglect.

## African Drummer

A face full of sun,  
a wall made of bricks,  
a black man,  
eyes dancing  
with fingers on bubbles of air;

The bucket's plastic  
is the skin of his drum,  
while an empty cup gathers coins  
of recognition, of rhythms,  
not made of the counted bits of city glass

but felt, grown,  
from water and earth.  
Travelers walk by,

their steps beating a different kind  
of time, the  
push and pull of distant places . . .  
but here, now, some stop, listening,  
this attraction of centers, points  
where  
energies converge.  
the strangely familiar flowers

from some far  
away land, a land  
once ours, but which we left behind.



No one knows the language he sings,  
yet the body knows,  
sensing some other order of movement,  
a movement which turns  
around the source of his smile,  
which is not of this  
place, not,  
of this clime.

*(for an anonymous street musician,  
Central Station,  
Amsterdam, Holland  
Winter of 1988)*

## Guru

As the door closes, a jingle  
of bells—raining, cold,  
the shop is warm but not crowded.  
She looks out the display window  
onto the narrow,  
busy street—small cars,  
pedestrians, a woman with  
a child on the

back of her  
bike navigates the  
flow...

She sees this,  
amazed, the so determined look  
of the young mother,  
an envelope of  
protection from somewhere. Thoughts cross  
her mind this way—*cars, traffic, noise*—  
which she can't quite get  
hold of . . .

\* \* \*

The berries of the mountain ash  
are almost too big  
for the tiny winter wrens. He  
stops, amazed, counts seven or more

all on the same tree;  
they show no fear;  
ecstatic with fall, they are gone.  
The limbs of the bare

tree shiver,  
his camera, covered  
with wet snow...

\* \* \*

She sees this  
as the book slowly opens upon  
a face, an image

of a man,  
seated, eyes closed, with

a triangulated silence,  
a projected calm,  
the sound of words she repeats by  
heart—*mantra*, *yantra*, *tantra*, like  
fingers ticking off  
overtones on a taut  
little drum. The face frightens her,  
yet fills the shop with

an intense  
aura of longing.  
“*Go away!*” she closes the book,

(“Go away “..)

Sitting, hands folded,  
they have been there all morning long,  
s i t t i n g, snap goes the stick, s i t t i n g.  
a faint temple bell  
rings; it is over...

“Thought,” she  
thinks. (“Thought “....)

\* \* \*

The blackbird begins his practice  
once day equals night,  
snow mixed with mist, just barely light,  
he tests the silence with a few  
notes, listening, then  
glides swiftly down the  
mountain, low, wings closed, just above  
the surface of the

ice—  
wings opening on

his look-  
out rock, a fluent flourish of  
chirping metallic figures and

he is  
motionless.

(She thought,  
perhaps she should get... a

cushion;  
she does have a tendency to

fall

asleep.)

But the rose quartz—little candies

from the tummy of  
the Earth, she thinks, looking down at  
the face again— “*Meditation,*  
*that is what they say,*  
*in meditation.*”

“Yes...”

(“*thought “ ...)*

\* \* \*

He stops, abruptly, ramming in-  
to a patch of hard,  
crusted snow, then sits back and lets  
go, traversing swiftly, resting  
his uphill ski, “*There,*  
*perfect*”...leaps out on his right foot,  
then left, finding the rhythm, breath,  
down the mountain, fast.....

*“Sandal-  
wood is best,”* she thinks and closes

the book—  
outside, rain, *“Freedom, from the...known?”*

...very fast,  
*“Too fast,”* he thinks, as the snow turns  
to slush.....She opens her eyes—turns, and

clicks the door  
shut on the image.  
With a muted tinkling, she thinks,

*“thought...” “Freedom, from...”*

a faint  
jingling of

bells . . .

*(Amsterdam, on de Singel,  
Winter of 1990)*

# Spina Christi

As the earth leans back into  
the sun,  
little christ-bodies  
are aban-  
doned, left  
out to die in the acid mists of  
northern nights. green trees, dirty streets,  
no hope.

## Roots

cut short in brown burlap bags, a  
cover for an ancient trust now  
broken. New friendship found in the  
ornaments  
of alleyways, black bag mountains,  
old TVs. Before  
sunsight, the sound of strange tongues, but  
who could understand

these men in their trucks who come to  
remove  
the thorns of a city's  
eyes? Yes, a true gathering  
together of  
divine  
errors  
all. And in our sleep, tug boats going

out

to sea.

*(Amsterdam, de Pijp  
Christmas, 1990)*



# A Gathering Place

In a far  
corner, glass  
opaque and crusty with old manure,

the messy backyard  
of the barn's windowsill. Dark. Still,  
a gathering place  
of the preterite,  
for those

used-up  
empty, broken accessories,  
containers  
of a farmer's life;  
During

cleaning time, a place  
passed over,  
a bit out of reach,  
but too close, to put out of  
mind.

# The Dance of Chance

A toss  
of the dice...

The machine has no problem with  
randomness,  
abstracting order from chaos,  
whole songs computed at will. But  
the beauty of the butterfly's wings?  
Just blind permutations, the in-  
determinate  
survival, selection, of small

dotted poems

in a  
sequenced array, or  
the sure sign

of the  
open road, the future's pathless

land

unprecedented  
possibilities

a l l ?

# Tramontane

Bits of  
labor, left

behind, tasks now foreign to straight  
speaking tongues.

Closed doors reluctantly open  
as that which is unfamiliar  
is brought  
into the outside within....

The necessary work  
of inessential people, guests

held

hostage,  
a ransom  
s e l f - paid, the

outlandish  
price of membership to these strange

worlds

of  
aliens

a l l.

## A Woman Alone

Late.

After a concert,  
walking home.  
An evening shared with  
music and  
friends.

The city's  
night sky, dimly gray, the moon and  
stars, muted, hiding behind

tall brick buildings, bright lights.  
Time in the city  
flows differently at night; not the  
measured beat of the day's lock-step,  
but an

unpredictable, many-voiced  
movement  
like the water of a narrow  
ocean pass, cliffs on either side  
hyaline sheets, dark, motionless, one  
upon the  
other, suddenly swallowed whole  
by

eddies  
so vicious they ravage themselves.

She senses  
this, in  
the body, that tender place, just

below the navel  
which itself turns and  
sometimes reverses directions,  
as the heart beats the  
changes of an unsure safe passage...

No task for  
the timid, to call this place home,  
to live with

this necessary  
ambiguity  
of movement at night—  
the shadow can go both ways,  
slipping back into its silent

light post,  
or lashing out at you, with a . . .

## The Literal Man

Stretched between the most distant of  
stars and the  
sparks which fly from the  
candle's match  
is the silver string of  
young intelligence,  
a vibrant face among the flowers,  
resonant with the music of all

springs.

Still close  
to the ground  
where perception begins, before  
thought's cells grow thick and woody walls,  
and where meanings still  
flow and freely merge,  
where triangles and squares become  
rounded in rhyme, and where the moon  
is an apple on the  
tree which has its roots in the sky.

*Break the string*  
and the apple falls  
into the lap of an unhappy

grown-up, eyes dull with  
years of TV,

the life of one channel only  
which does not change, which does not change;  
where sense stays at home, alone, a-  
fraid to venture out,  
and becomes  
precisely, neatly, bounded in

time.

*Break the string*  
and the stars  
at night will fail to cohere and

start to fall,  
no longer turning  
around their centers,

no longer,  
threaded together,  
in song.

# On the Wayside

*for Owenuma Blue Sky*

What's a weed but the unwanted noise  
of another man's music.

But beyond the margin,  
that little strip of uncultivated life  
to the side of a well-traveled road,  
rank growth is my splendor.

Everything needs a place to be,  
and here, even the weeds feel at home,  
a free space where the troublesome  
have gathered together, un-

folding their own songs,  
f l o w e r i n g  
in peace.

*(the Alps,  
Winter of 1987)*







# Part VII

## *Leaves*

*Sometimes,  
even trees notice*

*there's a fence  
between them.*



## First / Last

(1)

Each day the first, new  
shapes grow out of the disappearing  
darkness, the color of damp leaves

and pine. Trees

standing firm, giving  
back our movement, your voice, first light.

(2)

This patience of trees,  
an unmoveable trust of the earth  
upon which they stand, nets weav-

ing themselves

into the light, the  
dark, growing in a l l directions.

(3)

Walking out into  
the growing darkness, events of  
the day dropping like leaves after

the first freeze

of fall. Windless days  
not returning, each night the last.

(0)

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# Leaves

(1)

Oak leaves: white, black,  
red to scarlet and bur—

smooth lobes  
to prickly bristles  
and back, bringing out  
the myriad accents  
and turns of a phrase.

(2)

Small, quiet pond with  
round water drop of leaf,  
no need of stem.

See it rise...  
into lance, feather,  
perfect heart-shaped form.

(3)

The summer fades behind you,  
as late one morning you  
look up from your work,

and the sound of the leaves  
is suddenly drier, higher  
in pitch, and your thoughts

naturally turn from arcane theory  
to the facts and practice of shelter  
and the coming cold.

Far away in the mountains  
it is already snowing, and  
a deep and uneasy quiet descends  
upon all the passes heading South.

Did they cross safely  
to the other side?

The crows know that this is when  
the pulse and flow of rivers ease, and  
the orchestra of strings stops,

now listening, to tune and tune  
again, sensing the hushed sway  
of trunks in the spruce forests  
of the far North.



How broad and slowly the  
waves of wind pass through  
the crowns of tall trees.

A hocketus of shrill cries marks  
the crows' departure, as an empty  
branch bobs nervously about;

arched back, a quick trill  
of the paws, and  
the gray squirrel has  
stashed another piece of gold.

(4)

Perhaps leaves fall simply  
to carry away all that we  
thought we needed to say.

And perhaps trees in this  
way purify themselves each  
year knowing that there is

no thought so large that it  
cannot be written on  
the smooth, plain surface  
of but a single—

leaf.

# Two Little Poems about Everything

## (1) One Morning

One morning, the mountain farmer goes out  
to milk his goats and never comes back;

A quiet stream leaps from the edge of a high  
granite cliff and disappears into the late  
summer air;

Sitting in an alpine meadow, more flowers  
than grass, the sound of delicate bells  
rings out,

    wave after wave,

from the metal which sleeps in rocks.

## (2) Stone Mountains

If one carries the mountain in one's heart, to  
pick up the stone is to pick up the mountain,  
the world.

But for us, a stone is just a stone and nothing  
more, just so much dead weight,  
like a pack which grows heavier  
with each passing step.

Half way up, half broken, turning back...  
and the sound of stone mountains  
just *is*—in the wind.





# Part VII

## *Seasons*





# The Fall Moor

Constantly running about from high to low and here to there, this freedom of movement, one of our most precious of evolutionary gifts, does have its dark side.

Will we ever know... . . . .

the rounded repose of water at rest, of  
a small pond in a highland moor;

first but a shadow on the winter snows,  
the melting then its rising, gladly receiving  
each drop of the spring rains,

so freely offering a protected space for the  
throaty love songs of creatures of a two-fold  
nature.

Or the motionless resilience of ancient trees,  
inhabitants of a lowland forest;

Each day, the beech renews its romance  
with the space into which it has grown so  
slowly and knows so well,

it has long ago made room for the nails of the  
farmer's fence, having eased around these  
wires with prickly barbs, a skin which grows  
smooth with age.

## November Snow

To the side of a cascade of little waterfalls,  
the yellow-golden leaves of a mountain ash  
drop one by one into the clear pool where the  
water gathers itself together and rests a while.

A hermit might build a hut here simply  
to count the numbers of their passage.  
Sitting, watching, working out the intricacies  
of a lute's tablature, pondering how the

turning, tuning downwards of but a single string  
shifts our gaze from the steady rise of soaring  
birds and blue skies to the sound of a minor  
key's slow, continuous descent into earth.

Falling, everything falling. After a sharp  
freeze, the avalanche alders of the north-facing  
slopes give up their dry, dark brown leaves in  
but a single day. Branches growing along

the ground, then steeply rising like a strung bow,  
they're ready to disappear under six feet of winter snow.  
Along the path where no one has been for weeks,  
the sweet, rusty fragrance of the alpine rose brings

a muted echo of solstice pink. Without a trace of wind  
or even a nutcracker about, the needles of the larch  
forest tumble round and around themselves in slow

motion, falling to the mossy floor below.

November, that time of year when the lost, longed for strophes of verses naturally rise within us on the sound of low plucked strings. What chord might give back the movement of the black lichen's meticulous growth on its granite rock?

The farmer leaves the kids home with the pumpkins and goes with his wife on weekend trips to Paris and New York to buy chestnuts and find out, while the professor takes over the hogs in the barn, chews on lean bacon and asks the same question.

Two old crows, always the same couple, one with a few feathers missing from its left wing, fly the same trajectory every day, slightly right of center valley, West then East;

They gave up trying to figure out the fingering to the song long ago. The furry marmot watches and blinks his eyes for the last time from his lookout rock before retreating into his winter hole, as an eagle,

wings tightly closed, rests, far above on its cliff. A single car, lost perhaps, shifts gears along the one lane road that feels its way up the misty mountain, all listening, listening for the sound of that chord which forever falls.

## Winter Solstice

That quiet time of year when thoughts  
of the past naturally turn to face the  
stars of the North, and we sit in front  
of the winter fire, alone,

gently burning away the burden of what  
has been. Old books go, manuscripts go,  
bills, letters never sent, even things we  
wish we would have said. We watch

them burn, the crackling sound of the dry  
pine bringing the hard, heavy oak into flame,  
irregular reminders of the unexpected  
which broods and ripens

within the silent, glowing coals. That dark  
time of year of many candles and delicate strings  
of white lights that help us remember  
the slower, more subtle rhythms

of the Earth itself, now not confused  
by too much of the sun's glare. Some spaces  
are meant to be empty; they're precious,  
vulnerable, but oh-so-easy prey for

the religious contractors pounding at the door or trying to get down the chimney at night. But the fire is hot enough, and there's the simple promise of handmade gifts which do not arrive

until spring. For weeks now, the sound of carols, old and new, has been heard during the evening hours, a sound passed on from village to village, like a fire which must not be allowed to die out.

# The Winter Moor

Deep, fluffy, snowshoe snow, falling  
day after day. No wind, the ground  
slowly rising, covering color,  
rocks, small trees;

smoothing out the many variegated  
accents and differences of the summer  
moor into long, white, sweeping,  
elegant, legato lines suspended  
in time like clouds to be  
walked upon.

If you could see it, the moon would seem  
so close that you could poke a pole at it.

No path, even the grouse don't seem to be about, and  
the pool has vanished without a trace.

They say there are places so powerfully peaceful and  
quiet, that, if one were to play a properly tuned, long  
wooden alpine horn in the right direction,  
at the right moment,

that the sound of the higher partials would carry  
over every visible peak  
and beyond,

and in some deeply forested,

remote valleys,

not be heard for more  
than a million years.

## **Ringling the Changes at Candlemas**

Drifting, cold, deep snow everywhere,  
filling all the unseen cracks in the houses.  
The furry snow bunnies are meeting up on  
winter mountain, and the priests have run  
out of money and have all gone home.

The children light candles for each  
star in the night sky while the  
grownups drink hot coffee, sit at  
the round table, and speak in earnest  
of getting rid of all the tanks.

Heavy metal, slow metal, cold metal,  
the sound of bells, thousands  
of bells, swaying back and forth,  
a wave of joyful sound,

passing on from city to city  
to city, some say,  
as swiftly as  
the turning of the Earth itself.







# Part IX

## **For a Friend and a Crow**

*for Paolo*

Mid-morning, sitting in new  
snow with an old friend;

an eagle flies by with a crow  
on its tail.

Above, below—always with two begins  
the movement of our world.



**Oracle—**  
*a reader of signs*

*The blackbird runs nervously in  
quick staccato steps, yellow beak  
thrust forward, then stops,  
cocks its ear to the ground, then runs  
hurriedly again.*

Old, old:—, she  
sits next to the spring.  
The water appears suddenly  
at the surface of the earth like  
a music which steps  
into the world  
but reluctantly, beginning  
over and over

again, rehearsing  
in a whisper the faint sounding  
sibilants of an almost vanished  
tongue. She listens, but  
knows not from where the water comes.

Cool, clear, constant  
in its flow, the water is un-  
touched by rain, snow or summer sun.

Watching, swaying back and forth, she  
places her open hand above

a stream of minute  
whirlpools, then looks down into the  
swirling throat of the  
largest, turning her  
arm swiftly in a counter gyre,  
murmuring something.

all but inaudible.  
She leans forward and pinches off  
a sprig of watercress, tasting  
the stem's peppery  
brassica, then swallowing the white

flowers  
whole.

\* \* \*

The men gather around in a  
tight circle watching  
the one, who, seated on the ground,  
tosses the yarrow sticks. They all breathe in  
with a gasp, their hands  
raised into the air,  
then pointing down, quickly, lifting  
patterns up into

terse talk of  
meaning. The man in their middle  
slowly traces a form in the sand.

Out of the river,  
a turtle rises and crawls to  
land, head, neck fully extended  
as if it had been from  
shore since before the beginning of time.

\* \* \*

The colorful display flashes  
as the three men watch the  
numbers turn all but instantly  
into black figures. The clever talk  
and laughter stop as  
the message in bold  
script steps down from top to bottom,  
predicting opportunity, but

great risk...  
they must move quickly.

*Crack* goes the shell, the  
heat of the fire fracturing its  
underside into myriad  
storylines, waiting,  
like a hand, to be deciphered and read.

*Crash* goes the code, the  
cold of the night bifurcating  
into myriad losses,  
everywhere, losses,  
like a terrible wind, taking all in its stead.

“All roads lead to the hidden center,”  
begins the prophecy. “Very  
auspicious. From there, proceed with  
the greatest caution,  
Follow in steps of 2s and 3s.”

...swallowing the white  
flowers whole...

“The yarrow stems should be gathered  
in late summer; it  
grows frequently to the side of  
roads, on poor soils, in large  
patches, much space between  
completely erect single  
stems which are woody and almost square.  
The white, sometimes pink,

flowers arrange themselves in tight  
umbels in patterns measured in fours,  
while the delicate leaves  
of many tiny feathers  
climb up around the  
central axis as a crow calls,  
in neat couplets of five  
against of two. A powerful plant;

it should  
be used with care—.”



The blackbird runs nervously in  
quick staccato steps, yellow beak  
thrust forward, then stops,  
cocks its ear to the ground, then runs  
hurriedly again,  
a different direction;  
it too is confused about the  
days, singing now

with hard frozen snow  
on the ground.

A fish, (was it a  
small trout?) nibbles at the surface  
of the quiet pool and is gone,  
ripples ringing in the  
clear spring water...How did it happen?

*Crack* goes the shell;  
*Crash* goes the code;  
the cold of the night,  
a myriad storylines, waiting,  
like a wind, taking all in its stead.

How did it happen?  
She looks and sees...  
She looks and sees...  
Before, after,  
now.

It took the  
whole world  
by surprise.

# Ironweed

Some colors are known  
to attract not only

the wingèd creatures of delight  
that fly the skies of the warmer seasons,

but also the young heart which is  
sometimes seen to flower even  
in the very old.

Stepping out of the universal gray  
of newspaper life,

closing her guide, thinking to herself,  
living in a world where even  
the goodness of mother's milk  
must sometimes be questioned,

she needs not a soul to tell her  
that, this color, this peaceful being  
of high summer,

is good, is beautiful—  
some might say,

the very essence of what is real.

## Far Away from Home

A radio plays in the empty kitchen.

Wind-eyes, opening to the West.

A gaze, motionless, longing for distance;

In the background, a keyboard's thin,  
electric sound, its bass firmly  
rooted in the past, but higher, five fingers  
feeling nervously about, far away from home.

A gold ring, stuck on water-soaked hands,  
rolls out that evening through a crack in the door.

At night, in thought's house, a question  
walks from street to street, alone.

It asks,

*“Which way,  
to the river,  
to the other side?”*

But no one seems to know.

There isn't a bridge.

There isn't even any water about.

And so, even the richest of sounds  
is so easily lost, finding no echo, no  
willing ears, no smooth surface upon  
which to spread its waves.

## A Witcher of Wells

Before she can say “*Don’t!*”, with one quick slice of his knife he cut another branch from the tree.

*“Hold it like this.  
Both hands.”*

He walked slowly but rhythmically, she, at an uneasy distance, following.

*“There,”* he says.  
*“They cross here,”* making a slow gesture with one of his hands, pointing down.

It was not her disbelief, at least not at first, but when another is sure of a thing you can neither sense nor see,

how are you to know?

He handed her his stick and with a few strokes drove a stake into the ground.

*“Could he be right?”* she thought.

That first winter, the new well  
didn't freeze. He had said it wouldn't.

Years later, always come fall, she  
took a simple pleasure in showing  
her children, and then her children's  
children,

the striking yellow-orange petals  
of flowers which seem neither too late  
nor too early,

but always just in time to remind her  
of the mysterious secret life of twigs  
which point both North and South, and  
the gift of pure, deep,

sweet water.

## Under the Tulip Tree

She thought quietly to herself:

*“Why is it that some people  
look as if they’re wearing  
uniforms even when they’re not?  
Do I look like that?”*

Sitting under the tulip tree  
she knows so well, full crown of leaves,  
summer sun warming her face, thinking,

was it Sunday, or was it  
still Saturday? She was trying  
hard to remember...

The night before had  
been hard, intense. They  
had lost two, or was it three?

The gray weather-beaten spruce  
planks of a bench made for two,  
asking for company,

an unbroken view of a lake  
reflecting clearly the suchness

of a welcome morning  
free of work,



already filling with the collective  
thought of

*“too little of this,  
and too much of that.”*

pondering, as her cigarette begins  
to burn slightly too hot,

how these large birds of endless skies  
and open waters

move so gracefully together,  
so peacefully feet-flat-on-earth  
and neck-held-high-in-morning-air,  
among and within themselves, were  
it not for the slight trace of fear

she sensed they still felt for her.

## American Linden

*“Sopra e basso—sempre due cose, inizia  
così il movimento del nostro mondo.”*

It was a blessing to be out in the open,  
out of her studio.

She watched the leaves of the Linden,  
how they were beginning to lose  
their shine and give themselves  
to the duller surfaces and more serious  
work of making summer wood.

May was her month, she felt—  
the month which did not so much end  
as dovetail with a long whispering  
diminuendo far into the breadth of June.

That is how she felt:  
Full crown of heart-shaped leaves,  
alternating gracefully on the twigs as  
a counterpoint of voices in a choir.

Moving, all leaves together, this was  
texture, pure space. Time,  
she knew, could be such a bore,  
having to sit patiently at the keyboard,  
or worse, listening to others play,  
until she had all five or six voices flowing

in her hands. But the Linden, with its  
bands of shimmering leaves,  
was simply there, all at once. She  
could so easily move from whole  
to single trembling leaf and back again.

*“Was this a woman’s space?”* she asked herself.  
Men, she knew, were wont to compare leaves  
on a tree to pages in a book, pages  
upon which something must be composed.

But to hear the sound the Linden makes in May  
was for her to feel the same afternoon wind  
move across her smooth skin, tapping toes barefoot  
in cool grass, listening to the slow rhythmic  
waves of sound.

She looked down into the score  
she had brought with her. She found her  
fingers rehearsing the movements, going  
over them, again and again.

*“That’s it!”* she thought, erasing a  
figure that had never felt quite right.  
From her Grandmother, she had learned  
to speak to her thumbs like a pair of stout  
twins, anchoring the rest of a large family,  
but just as easily stumbling a bit  
behind the others.

*“There!”* she said aloud, her right hand

running off the page like a hungry robin,  
then stopping just as abruptly.

Would she dare? she thought anxiously.  
“*Tonight?*” Suddenly she was full of fear.

Tonight was going to be her night, her concert. Hers.  
She repeated the fingering, right hand, then  
left, again and again, then singing  
the melody as she moved. “*Yes, yes!*” she conducted  
herself, letting the score fall to the ground.

Like someone suddenly aware of time as  
measured by the clock, she stopped, looked up  
and leapt to her feet, running under the Linden  
tree like a frightened little girl hiding herself  
from intruders. “*Was that why he never left the studio  
towards the end? No more concerts. Just recordings.  
Was it going to rain?*”

She took hold of a leaf as the wind shook  
the tree, never before seeing the pale green  
of the fingerlike bracts just below the unopened  
blossoms. She could sense a much older  
woman than herself collecting  
them for fall teas. She opened  
her eyes.

“*Have to go now. Practice. Prepare.*”  
Even as a small child, this had been  
all she had ever known.

Tonight was going to be her night. Hers. Running back to the house, almost forgetting her other papers, all the letters that needed attending to, she could hear the music now within her as if completely surrounded by it and yet somehow above it, as if she were listening from both in- and outside the sound, hearing it as a clear crystal taken in on all its sides in but a single breath.

*“Would he be there tonight?”* she asked herself. *“Would he...?”*

She had sometimes noticed how, in a full hall with the lights dimmed, she would unexpectedly look up from the keyboard and see—her lips began to move with the sound of his slight accent—a face that seemed to emit a presence entirely its own.

*“Would he, be...?”*

She looked back and saw that the leaves of the tree were quiet now. Faces in a crowd, so close, so intimate, yet anonymous and so far away. She pressed the score to herself as never before, composed herself carefully, and was ready for whatever the night would bring.

## North Face

*“Sein Wachstum ist: Der Tiefbesiegte  
von immer Größerem zu seim.”*

*“His growing is: being defeated, profoundly,  
by ever greater things.”*

Rainer Maria Rilke

Relief. Relief, the  
deafening roar of the helicopter.  
Relief. Relief.

She sat between the men,  
shivering uncontrollably, the world  
empty of sound, understanding nothing  
of what they said. She saw only  
the lips move, horrifyingly slow, time  
and space ripped apart. *“Where  
is he?”* she asked.

Their first night out  
she had slept so deeply,  
awakening with the coming  
light, feeling the warmth on  
her whole body, watching  
the earth discovering  
all the many colors, one by one,  
as if for the first time.

She had heard the rocks fall,  
but couldn't see them,  
a high pitched buzz dropping off rapidly.  
None had touched her.

She had had a premonition  
the day before. He had dropped  
one of the water bottles as  
they both watched, together,  
paralyzed in fear, how quickly it  
accelerated beyond their grasp  
and had slipped  
from the ledge and out of

sight only to reappear ramming  
against needles of granite and ice,  
falling so far and fast that it separated  
from the body of its sound.

He had broke her fear with  
a gentle laugh, saying that if it  
snowed again that day, they  
would have water enough.

*A photograph:* Deeply tanned skin.  
Serious face. Hair which had known  
much sun and weather. The smile which  
he carried with him always.

They gave her something warm to drink.  
She pushed it away, then reluctantly,  
shaking, took it to her lips. "*Where  
is he?*"

After the shower of rocks,  
there was only wind, and space,  
a terrible empty space.

There was no weight  
at the other end. She  
hadn't pulled.

They were descending fast. "*Where is  
he?*" None of the three men spoke.

*A photograph:* She loved the ropes.  
Everything about them, the feel,  
the craft, the color, the ritual of  
care, packing them out, of putting  
them away.

They were descending fast. She noticed  
the leather boots of one of the men, how  
they seemed to fit so perfectly.  
"*Where is he?*" she asked.

...p e r f e c t l y.



None of the three men spoke.  
Even with the noise of the landing,  
the world was still,  
terrifyingly still—wholly,  
  
still.





## **(Coda) Of Birds and Trees**

Strong chinook winds have driven me  
inside. From my window, I see  
a young male blackbird, its eye rings  
still dark, perched on a mountain ash.  
The tree, also young, is leafless,  
but bright red clusters of berries  
grace its bare limbs like ripe ornaments  
for a festival of fall.

The tree, the bird, swing back and forth  
to the wind's irregular rhythm.  
The bird's neck extends and shortens,  
easily keeping his balance.  
Eyes so alert, the head bends down,  
first slowly, then quickly snatching  
a little fruit, swallowing it  
whole. Then he's off, another tree.

Birds don't stay long in one place. Or  
is this just the way of birds and  
trees? One must do the work of  
staying put, roots firmly grounded  
in rocky soil, new fruit each year;  
while the other, flying freely  
to unknown places, carries with  
him the seeds of falls yet to come.





Cover images: *Fireweed & November Snow*  
by Cliff Crego  
Rilke translation by Cliff Crego  
Questions and comments for Cliff Crego  
may be addressed to [crego@picture-poems.com](mailto:crego@picture-poems.com)  
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