

AMERICAN GRAMOPHONE

POEMS BY
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for Rob

One

American Gramophone

Crows returning in large flocks to rearrange
the body of a tree. The sound of something black
and sharp flying into its own reflection; a folktale
spoken aloud; a spell. In this verse a neighbor
with one good hand lays a bridge across his creek.
What is more reliable than this new wood growing
full of holes. The day is wasted watching horses
drag their shadows the length of the field and back.
The spine spoils its own alignment—serpent curve
like a shelled thing, seaborn. Legless. Weighted,
the gate calls out. If I could choose, it would be a seat
out of earshot. If the song were played again
from the beginning, it would wind its own notes down.

The Somnambulist

From airshafts I hear rummage. And summer
long. A matter of joint-rot and den,

a toothsong constant as a clatter of calves

and as blind. The needlepoint is (rootfringe
on a dead fig) fine. Concentration here,

crosshatched rag and gall, the fibers gouged

with stitch-lift. Awareness is like this, the stirring
low of swallows banking and impossibly

flown. Then a lamping in the wicker hour,

a stall, suspicion summoned or released, awake
all evening like cattedogs unhooked from sleep.

Speech after the Removal of the Larynx

This transcription is a measure of the distances between sounds and their captors. My earliest memory: silence, a waterbird's insistence, hovering. There are some currents that take up anything that falls. I took up the yarn, wound it repeatedly around the hands. I said my earliest memory is of rabbits darkening warrens. A swarm of hornets is articulate. There is no difference between sound and communication; I am satisfied if the strong consonants trigger memory. It is quiet here. Let speech be heron.

Comes again like a costume of foxglove

inconstant at every entry. Survival is a morning habit,
a declaration of reversal,

a southravel. I learned balance from the collar bone,
from water filled

with windswill. To pour is to allow the possibility
of an animal

in repose, an enemy long in the arms. Comes again
this version of night:

sandflies ticking themselves into a dry spell, igniting
downwinged

in the earlywood. The sickness of violins. New sage
greening in a blackbottom pan.

Winter Drowning

Then our words fell (fly-ash on a river)
and failed us. Then the riddling

began: *Because of the wooden well-top*

*shelved on the shore. Because of the old well's
open eye. We stood straighter: clavicle*

and spine, common with timber

in mind. Catchweed called us back
by the ankles. We considered the passageways

required for breath and everything slowed—

the snow filling the woodlot, the foxes,
their stillness mistaken for self-possession.