

Notes Toward an Unheard Music

It Must Begin

I

The thrones stood up among flat stones, the river
dim and twinkling. Minnows under stones
sat on them. Cherabim, some sporting gills,

embodied phantoms, indistinct, their legs
wings, began to breathe and upward labored.
Mayflies then, wore wings, made substance of air

above the water falling in its way.
Water has intent, principalities
and every angel angeling, bird-buzzing

out of under stones. The flat, the wedged,
water hoarded, moss blessed, must manifest
leeches, aquatic worms, black fly larvae,

one end of body wider than the other,
cause of change, three tails or two, hooks at
the end of leg or body beetle-like.

The thrones rule in the night as well as day,
color of mist and foam, this sound unchanged,
not even noise, no, noise with body, noise

that stands upon a throne, unchanging noise.
Wings wear down within it, wear out, two tails
or three, muse noise, spelling itself a music.

II

The maestro of stones must name the rose or else
it will take wing. The seraphim of rocks
will abuse the mountainside in its name.

It is the name that hides the rose then, not
the maestro with his bent back and grim being.
The rose is not the named, nor is the name.

Why should the minnows rise and hover, out
of some dark thought or wild horn call, stark gleam
of jay, echoing in time through the years,

those rivers after rain of life, after
weeds and worms, riparian watershed.
The stream listens to jays or Beethoven

with the same interest as green stoneflies.
And the seraph of rocks winks and glitters.
Now the steeps have been left behind – around

this music, something like a caddis house
has woven – scraps of all things put away.
There is no hearing it though every angel

lift the stone and stir the seine, wings buzzing
like blue damselflies, lovers on a stem,
light gathered under skirts of sycamores.

III

This monument of water now fallen
on its side is at once the same and still
haven of shadows flickering with meaning.

Beneath it, scud, sowbug, crayfish sing fourths,
intone in words never imagined the green
of dark and bubble, clamor of all fallen,

the lean of ruin, the sag of peace – awful,
this stillness, and sudden each particle
of light remembering the sun, his pallor.

We pilgrims and players approach, come down
from the watershed like moss, in trickles
and trophies tumbling – here we watch not

in awe but duty the dim monument
showing only its silver flank – or bronze
or copper bleeding riverine downstream

fast full of fish, invisible and keen,
skulpin and mild minnow, hearts beating praise
to water mite and flatworm, clam and fly –

like a violin, the mountain plays
its fallen stream, lost soldier who has changed
unchanged. It is the same, a turtle cries.

IV

If the yin and yang of it came first, what of
the poem, what of beginning, not fire or rain,
the animals moving to higher ground –

the still feeling the quick – Touch depends
on feeling – not a stick in September's spider webs,
winding numbly – one hand or the other,

ten legs or more, eight legs, six jointed legs,
music that falls, music that rises, near
and close, the poem begun, not knowing how

the touch unwound the web. The sea draws back.
A mountain in its solitude feels some
unearthly itch. Sun and rain are not two but

a multitude. Ten legs or more in waves
of sawing bows, and sound, the yin and yang
of it, its voices chattering, celestial

cocktail party under stones, web in the air
kiting. The poet and his ear are one.
Not yet begun, this water dripping to

its stream, its fall, apart and of a piece,
here in the monument, among the stones,
and then, companion to all, the rising.

V

The sun's footprint on a gravel bar grows
white, bone white, rib by rib – call it a run.
This is where it died. No weeds, no shadows

remain. Part of a tree rubbed smooth, more ribs,
is wedged across the way it wandered from.
This once was river green, worn half to moss.

Wolf run, moss run, run shivering away
until stones slowly bake and clouds' eyes close.
River does not remember place, this run.

Once dobsonflies, fishflies, and alderflies,
megaloptera, were green as this moss
deep in the murmurs, the riffing, deep

in the shallows of the run, another place.
Elsewhere, elsewhere, the river runs, a child
of itself, child of worlds of rivered risings.

River never wonders, cannot look back
with sadness at the fading light unless
he turn into it, and the turn is music

in itself, begun before it dies, lost
in falling, remembering the frail clouds,
the ones waiting for rising yet to come.

VI

So be, so be, the catbird in some tree
must call to limpets, water mites and scuds.
So be, his soft feathers cowl mutterings.

Angels in walkers buzzing the ground – robins
diligent, one eye listening – Jay,
banjo of jay, and upward fourths away,

all Brahms, so be, some say, all forestry.
This gay unquiet, clicking of wheels turning,
the hummingbird's complaint, not yet, not yet.

Cannon at the many, enter where you will.
Fugue of impossible beginnings, winks
of small minnow, mayflies, thorax and head,

abdominal gills, prolegs, wing pads, be,
so be, the wet that spreads the earth, so be.
Above, beneath this fractured stone, lost leaves,

the old pages telling the planet's tale,
words promised, wind forgotten, filaments –
We say this to you, already planted,

sprouting in stone and stone, and there will come
of this nothing, so be, and of nothing
such a symphony, such beginning. So be.

VII

Bird singing in this moon clatter downpour.
Crazed cheer and rain after rain descending.
Above the cloud some moon interior.

Of the image, hymn or obbligato,
all this is real: world rushing through its rain,
world within bird, bird calling to birdcall.

A cloud of crepe myrtle blossoms raining,
raining the same rain, fragrant as pulled roots.
Between abundance and nothing there is nothing.

Here, after the cloud's gift, this gathering,
this breathing in, heart beating in birdcall.
Love lives in a fish's jump, sculpin shatter.

We are the weave, the peeper's cries, tapestry,
each cry a gathering of cries, grown wild
as weeds, the love of animals, of love.

The cloud is lit, gathers away its poems.
Here in the book of roots we write all music,
songs birds gather up, the one eye, the other,

the book and its dark pages, closed as stone,
scholars of dust and reason, in many
places, understanding the end of rain.

VIII

Though the sycamore is not the Bodhi tree,
this pilgrim came about the world among
stones swimming in shadow. I am pilgrim,

said he. Pilgrim to thee. Crayfish. Sowbug.
From light to darkness. He set forth flat worms,
annelidae, mussels and clams. And dark

among the stones and deep in murmur, grew
light, and pilgrim heard ephemeroptera
becoming one, becoming many.

Pilgrim said again, I have come to thee.
I bare my burning before the swarm. I rise
among the order of the multitude,

the naked swarm. The nameless swarm attends
my fate. Then sycamore, no Bhodi tree,
gave light a moment's glare. Attend, pilgrim,

the slight shadow that came before, shadow
that follows. Shadow is the dragonfly.
Under the stone, under the tree, pilgrims

believe and disbelieve. The swarm is gone
that made no sound, but shadows persevere.
Day after day, no breeze may pass this way –

IX

Since birds sing to birds, perhaps the poem listens
to the poet's wonderings. Perhaps,
bouncing among the reeds like dragonflies,

it echoes. So time is passing without
our notice, and poems appear and disappear,
mourning and celebrating, reaching

for words or batting them away, taking
notice of some constant murmuring made of light, shadow,
light passing into shadow, beginnings,

endings, the poet's wonder nearly grasped,
turned and remembered like the day before,
the line before, the line that came before

its words, before its music, filament
of heat, of wonder, floating leaf, turning
gibberish, clutter of the day, the night,

passing over stones, their hiding settling
crevices. The common page is turning,
its moment past - a hand is not an ear.

Words have been here, and they have washed away,
tumbling and wearing down. They mean to mean,
to slow and root, to send seeds into air.

X

A log was their clef, this line of musing
turtles under sun. Nothing slows the still,
not sun, not flash of bird. The key of G

spells possibilities in air, color
of seraphim and principalities.
Nothing as elegant as words survives

this torpor. Something will begin, will move
against watching. Words take up meaning like
the caddisfly his case. Gravel and sand,

a will to be, a will to mean something
more necessary. Take it up. Carry
it away. The next world flows after it.

Let go. And do not pass this way again.
Take up another life. The log in sun,
the throne of stones, the river of ourselves

fallen and falling, always about some work.
By and large, sailing into the wind, sailing
before the wind. The words we watch watch us.

There in the poem which must begin they change,
seep from the high ground, broken underbrush.
Time takes the time time takes. Even these words.