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Planting a Vineyard

Joseph Dionne

Grand Valley State University

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ACROSS THE RIVER'S bend,  
Dourly folded in the haggard light  
Lapping at our breakfast window,  
Damp shrouds of undetected snow  
Had slicked the late March night and set  
Its sprung trees back to winter; all around  
They sagged and shuddered as the slow,  
Reluctant passage through gaunt skies unwound  
Of lowering clouds, harried by a querulous wind.

Not six scant hours before,  
We three, a company of strangers,  
Peered from the warm, soft-shadowed room  
Into a mirror, sealed from storm  
By light seeded from remotest stars  
That in our eyes burned closer, loitering there.  
Words from that peace would gather home  
Sparks from hushed space, each tremulous fire  
Atoned at last, each voice familiar.

Now, in the morning's flatness,  
Three friends, grown silent as the curtaining mist,  
Rose to a punished earth:  
River sullen with decaying froth,  
Small woods chastened, shorelines lost  
In eddying, abandoned flakes. Then from stiff trees  
A wild hammering of wings broke forth --  
Squirreling, defiant cries --  
As squirrels filched from jays or chickadees

The remnants spread upon their table.  
Cardinals came, an oriole;  
A stuttering of mallards  
Dropped, scattering, like discarder shades  
Tossed from the varying gale...  
Head filled with their flash against the cruel  
Blight on the day, surprised by birds,  
I made my transient's farewell  
And left, cold music in the tires: habitual exile

Who sees yet in a place afar  
That house hospitable to strangers  
Where, as he dreams, bright gusts of twittering stars  
Burst from its window large as light  
Across the Chippewa.

PLANTING A VINEYARD

The rootstocks take eight years  
from cane to wine. The earth  
disavows this measurement. The  
glacier, in a rocky ghost, marks  
nothing in the fat rods of these fields.

The land travels inside our head,  
spinning on failures, furling on the  
mis-spent, overgrowing the mystery  
and measure of a daughter.

Eighteen inches into Michigan, eight  
feet apart. The furrows parallel the  
lake and the dreams of moving things:  
there is the reach of two dead men  
between them.

This soil unlearns the polished bone.  
This sandy ground heaves over in rolling  
scars. There are ghosts in these wounds:  
Chippewa kneeling in the sumac, the fox  
bending the moon into a slow, tight, fire.

In the wine there is the dry salt of  
captive things, the bleached odor of  
shale stitched with fossils, the rib  
cage of the melodious lake.

Late at night, drunk, riding the tip  
of the mind to sleep, my blood is a  
swollen pool, a hallway into prison,  
an inheritance of all blood dispossessed.