

Crane Poetry: Don Welch

Rowe Sanctuary

The sanctuary knows its place.
It has so for a million years,
its grasses the original transcriptions
of how stems whisper winds.

And no one interprets this river
better than the cranes,
each one a long gray syllable
in the book of love.

This sanctuary says, *Come in.*
Wash you face in the wind,
Co-create wonder with your eyes,
Treat your soles to something

Other than cement. It says,
Worship is a natural event.
It's here you justify your lives.

White Cranes in Spring

--for Marcia

There were white cranes that spring,
the feathered bowls of their wings
scooping out air, lifting them up
like unstemmed peonies.

Over the Gulf they could only circle
so long as Galveston's halos
before they broke for the Platte,
a blue braid which runs through Nebraska.

For centuries they had dances on
corn bones, on the fossilized memories
of nomads, or played contrabassoon
to the winter through the long folds

in their syrinx. In each bird
was a red germ, the unison cipher
of sex. And that spring,
paired up, we too flew north,

following the kissed-out leaves

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of the willows, as if for a million springs
we had said the same thing
and were crying it horsely.

The Cranes

--for Stan Smith

As I lay in bed this morning,
the window open, the cranes going north,
in a half sleep I thought
this is what it's like
after hours into a migratory flight,
the landscape so far away it's lost,
my limbs and muscles separated
from my head, consciousness
turned in upon itself

Somewhere above me the cranes
with their slow stiff wings
had pulled out of the river.
After veering toward the sandpits
to avoid the cottonwoods,
rising over the highways,
over the wetlands and stubbles,
they had ordered themselves in loose V's
above Kearney.

Over the courthouse the lead males
were letting out their long-fluted voices,
falling around the head of the buffalo
on the county building. Then
over town, past the big lightless bulb
of the water tower, and north,
all the time gathering height to join
the geese that had been on the wing
for at least 12 hours, their limbs and muscles as slow and as regular
as heart-beats, their eyes seeing
but not seeing, the worlds inside their heads
half of the distance we call dreams.

Sometimes I remember all of this
this morning. The woman coming in
through the window had the hands
of spring.

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Endings, vi

--after an old song

With spring in our flesh
the cranes come back,
funneling into a north
cold and black.
And we go out to them,
go out into the town,
welcoming them with shouts,
asking them down.

The winter flies away
when the cranes cross.
It falls into the north,
homeward and lost.

Let no one call it back
when the cranes fly,
silver birds, red-capped
down the long sky.