

Emerson Susquehanna

i. *“When we have lost our God of tradition*

Not thaw brought to the river—
thought, long winter a surface that holds
no current or image.

And there’s language laid down like that, mind

locked in a long walk through the chill of a single word, and there’s cattails
fraught where water’s not
any longer, and *God’s* a pall called down to mind the meaning
given a life. Once thought

the word makes mind too small

like Bible-colored Sundays all study and chalk and exotic
potted palms dotting a holy land
entirely crayon and the lavender mimeographs leave

on the hands. The word *God* has always been my mother’s
fingers separating

my sister’s hair, three strands gathered in a braid so tight white at the parted dark
roots stood out, word

a migraine in its wake, word endured alone in a room. Shades
drawn over pain, word's
a mind's light ingrown, caught, nitid knot snarled upon
itself...Subzero, months
from thaw, we walk—o trees, trouble,
tremble at the roots of being, underneath,
under laws, the order of things
so deeply a violence and unnumbered like the snow.

ii. *& ceased from our God of rhetoric*

But I don't know
 their names—rust
worked under each
 wing like sweat
lunettes; synthetic
 silk crest stitched
to a white head;
 small gears completely
grease preening
 ash, mechanical
sheen of oil,
 charcoal—only
this description eats
 and screams
squanders territory.
 What use is it
to see? Faith
 the world is knowable?
There are ways
 to understand

and none is living
 or lyric, limp
or stutter.
 If I send a letter
(this sudden utter
 other means
than speech)
 when I don't
know to love
 language other
than to run
 a larceny
all machine and god-
 likeness, gear
and hinge, pocket
 watch, tie-
pin, money clip and wing
 tip, my father's
impostor I am
 then, my words
a mere guess at
 what isn't. It isn't

mastery I'm after.

It's certain

other terms

than my own

I wait for. For

instance : birds

without names

fly anyway

ceaselessly

up the ladder

cast from visible

to invisible—is it

it only seems

there's a way

to know the way?

so little shadow was left
like a sentence revised too often.

What happens is the mind
travels outward
because it wants to be the soul it has heard tell of.
Nervous work
like a bird—sky and power line, garbage can, underbrush—
it goes to them;

it intends itself toward oily black seeds
toward reflections
in ice and in glass
and it goes to the wind
and is shut out
which is no one's home.

Ever leave-taking,
action is its only description:
each shadow on the lamp-lit street
seeming to rush—molting out of itself—
each upward
to snow—
multitude of hurry, confusion—midair
to meet the idea that made it