

Genesis: Primeval Rivers and Forests

If these weren't so very ancient,  
they might easily be found. But they are  
deeper than subterranean Siberia,  
of a longer past than the oldest lichen  
fossil discovered in Rhynie soil, from  
farther away than found meteorite  
remnants of three billion years.

These primeval forests and rivers  
were the first to believe in trees dead  
but standing. They were the first  
to envision the living in the decay  
of the down-dead, the first to conceive  
possible orange rills of fungi, fluted  
white helvella, beetles, spider mites  
and spotted newts, a warty jumping slug  
hidden beneath fallen needles and duff.

Birds were among them then before  
there were birds, being mere wings of sun  
off the rivers before there were rivers,  
being mere flitting shadows in the upper  
canopy before there were shadows before  
there were canopies of flitting leaves.

And although these ancient waters  
flowing through storied rain forests  
have never been told, I imagine how  
they imagined before they conceived  
fish as smooth as silver glass, fat  
and buoyant on river bottoms, how  
they dreamed those fish swirling  
in schools of crystal to the surface  
without yet having bones, with no  
eyes of gold or scarlet gills, before  
flood or drought, current or cutbank.

Today the hiss of a single stem  
of seeded grass alone in a slender  
wind recalls the silence in far rivers  
and forests preparing for themselves,  
a silence expectant of wind, expectant  
of seed. A brief fragrance passing now  
suggests their beginning from absence,  
the fragrance of the origin of fragrance,  
damp oakmoss, sun on decay, the scent  
of nostalgia for a thing I imagined  
I knew before I knew.

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