

# Five Poems for Roni

Martin Robertson

## 1

One full half of the willow was riven away,  
the other half hollowed back almost to the bark  
and broken through in two places near the root  
so that only three struts of worn wood  
held up the tree. One branch from the main fork  
was broken and lay level from a ragged end  
resting on the strong spread of another willow.  
Yet fallen and soaring bough were rich in leaf  
as the solid trunks flanking this along the river.  
How can the sap rise?  
How does the tree live?

## 2

The living spirit, as beautiful and strong  
as the living body, has bravery to transcend  
the dying body, till the body dies.  
Then  
hangs in the air, an interrupted song.

### 3

There is no last rose.  
This year the constellations crowd and wander  
richer, wilder it seems than I have seen.  
No, the seasons offer  
no analogy for loss.  
Yet, this untamed recurring  
of brave, ephemeral beauty  
does bring us something  
beyond its loveliness:  
a resharpening, reshining  
of an ache into the pang  
which is so much more than pain.

### 4

Sea, stone, cypress,  
sharp-cornered shadow,  
wrenched olive (willow-  
grey, but no river,  
no mist)—another  
harsher country.

Here, in my country,  
flares no cypress.  
Misty willow  
dreams by the river,  
drops a soft shadow.

You, in your other  
land, tread another  
sharper shadow  
than ever willow  
weaves in this country  
—olive, straight cypress,  
sea and no river,

harsh sea-light. River  
weaves in this country  
soft light for willow  
to spread shade other  
than olive, cypress  
mean by a shadow.

Am I this shadow  
beside the river?  
—grey willow, other  
than olive. Cypress  
are you?—whose country  
is without willow.

Am I the willow?  
misty country,  
soft-light river?  
Are you the other?  
Even the shadow  
cast by a cypress

is cypress. Shadow  
of willow on river  
is another country.

## 5

The waste, the loss we said.  
Yes, but how bright and brave  
the flag at the mast head  
goes last under the wave.