

Martin Robertson

Five Poems for Roni

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.