

Poetry

The Cottonwood

Arthur Brown

There on the cottonwood, the leaves
made shadows of a lighter shade
than those that gave the creviced bark its depth,
the trunk its girth. You saw the brown
that gave the gray its earthiness.
You knew the trunk was rooted to the ground
and that the ground was dry.

You knew a dove had made a nest inside
the tree—you'd seen it on the wire, back-turned,
a spray of sticks and grass sideways behind
its hooded head and shoulder.
You saw it rise on limp and knobby branches,
flap, fan-tailed, and disappear behind
the leaves. All morning long you'd heard its mate—

the Morse-code cooing of the white-winged dove—
and heard the sparrows, too, and heard the whistling
of its wings; you saw it come and go, cawing,
as if a crow had taught it how to nest.
Meanwhile the shadows of the leaves descended,
growing denser, less discrete,
and moving less against the creviced bark.

And all this made you know you, too, were there,
since all there was existed in reserve—
outside of you, beyond what you perceived.
No inventory of the visible
or audible—the cars, the barking dog,
the doves—restricted what was in the world.
The words you took up presupposed

the doves, the ground, the cottonwood.
From things you drew your language and your thought,
as from the earth the landscape draws its form
or from the sediment the stream its color.
All things have style; they have their way of being.
The trunk was resolute—so it appeared.
It knew you better than you knew yourself.

Immanence

Arthur Brown

A late snow disappearing—juniper
and piñon rounded by the morning shadows.
And hidden in my vision of those hills,
my body and my time on earth, the death
that's wholly mine that makes the vision mine
alone. And yet more wonder in the thought
that were I presently to ask my wife,
whom I hear painting in the other room—
a child's room, whose walls had been bright yellow—
if she would come and look at what I see,
she, too, would see those hills and what they hide.