

Phyllis Webb

*v. (for R.D.L.)**

The error lies in
the state of desire
in wanting the answers
wanting the red-crested
woodpecker to pose
among the red berries
of the ash tree
wanting its names
its habitations
the instinct
of its ways for
my head-travelling
wanting its colours
its red, white, its black
pressed behind my eyes
a triptych
three-fold
and over
and wanting the bird
to be still and
wanting the bird
to be still and
wanting it moving
whiteflash of underwings
dazzling all questions
out of me, amazement
and outbreathing
become a form
of my knowing.
I move and it moves
into a cedar tree.
I walk and I walk.
My deceiving angel's
in-shadow joins me
paces my steps and threatens
to take my head
between its hands.

I keep walking.
Trying to think.
Here on the island
there is time
on the Isabella
Point Road.
We pass a dead
deer on the beach.
Bloated. It stinks.
The angel insists, "Keep
walking. It has all the time
in the world. Is sufficient.
Is alone. Keep walking."
it says and flies off
with my head.

What's left of me
remembers a funny song
also a headless
man on a rockface
painted in red
by Indian finger spirits.

The red-crested woodpecker swoops down
and sits on my trunk. Posing.
Dryocopus pileatus. "spectacular, black,
Crow-sized woodpecker with a red *crest*,
great size, sweeping wingbeats, flashing
white underwing." Pileated woodpecker.
Posing. Many questions.
"The diggings, large *oval* or *oblong* holes,
indicate its presence."

Zen Master.

*From the poem "A Question of Questions," in
Wilson's Bowl, Toronto: Coach House Press, 1980.
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