

Anthropomorphism Today

A black bird sits alone on the sill. Carved by artist Salvador Romero from a stone he found that suggested *bird*. Just a hop-skip away from *alone* is *lonely*. It's her downturned head, the angle of her gaze. What she knows but can't say. From the other side, she's not lonely at all. Just quiet. Older. Dignified. If I follow along the line of her neck, there's a vein of ore where a wing folds in and wedge of tail-feathers that keeps her steady.

Bird in my hand is how I work – pick her up, put her down, sort of like prayer. It's good to be accompanied. She's cool at first, then slowly warms as she accepts the heat I give – not *give-off*. What I offer is intentional: force of yearning, vapor of hope. With words, and not. Mostly not.

Back on the sill, she slowly returns our heat to the air.

Such are the conductive properties we share.

The keepers of my intellect taught against all this – applied the word *anthropomorphize* to sweep clean the ground under me and fashion a place where I was to stand on my own two feet. Far inland. Where, I was told, I was free from rising levels of likeness encroaching on my inviolable person. But look at the way she balances on the narrow sill, wings held close, bracing, like anyone on a slippery edge. I know that stillness: when the scrambling stops and in come the micro-gratitudes, unspoken or whispered under the breath: thanks for the twisted roots to grab, the solid deer trails leading out. I was meant to keep the borders firm. Make no forays, allow no incursions – all rules that assume such exchange is the mark of lost integrity. That a stone is inert, unvoiced, imperturbable. That is, does not hover, has no eye for what's being taken down

all around us. That it could not possibly teach anything. Though any stone you kick in the street is millions of years old – and lived or persisted through all of the eras we've ever named.

Stones have something we do not; their lastingness is our fantasy. My work, I was taught, if any good at all, had a shot at attaining posterity. To achieve that, it had to be *all my own*. I was to labor anxiously against influences, take in then shun the brilliance of elders, whose achievement would efface my efforts if I did not fight very hard, “even to the death,” to create myself.

Were there no options available?

Couldn't I have been rivered along? Lofted? Seeded? One in a colony, swarm, brood, pod, shoal? A sedge of cranes? A cloud of gnats? Been taught to see in the way of a stone, en route as it is to becoming sand, then airborne, on into a body, swallowed or breathed, nutrient or irritant, and certain to be, cellularly, another. And though not on our terms, isn't endless change a reliable form of perpetuity?

The keepers push me out in the air – not the air a bird lifts into, where everyone takes their turn as lead, rides the thermals, catches the scents – but a bracing air to clear my head.

The keepers want the bird off my chest – not in my hands, not held to my lips, not pressed to my heart or forehead or wrist, those places of electrical, arterial exchange, where tides pull and planets flare.

The keepers say *no lending out*, as if I'm not one version of. Or they're not. The billions of us all versions. Refractions. Parts. Parcels. The old kind of parcel, wrapped in brown paper and sent overseas to keep the cousins alive during wartime.

I consider it wartime now.

I'm on the side of keeping the cousins alive.

Once I stayed in a house with a big wooden bird in a filigreed cage. I think I was supposed to enjoy the ship-in-a-bottle effect, at least feel some wonder about how it was made. And though it wasn't *supposed* to fly, or move, or stretch – I mean, the bird wasn't *alive* – still, my grief attached to it. After the first day, I moved the cage to a sunny spot and opened the window to let the scent of the river reach in.

The keepers want to be sure I know the wooden bird is not a Bird. That *like a stone* means inert. That *a heart of stone, a wooden stare* – are ways of saying *cold, lifeless, mean*. But don't the white pines *broom* and *sigh* and aspens *beckon* with yellow fans? Doesn't breath make clouds in the cold? And look, closer still: all the branching forms that live in us – neurons, bronchioles, veins – repeat in lightning, watersheds, trees.

This morning, it's drafty on the sill. We're warming up. I'm asking about the feel of tucked wings, that moment in flight when you pull in and glide. It's like when the words lead. How easy it is. And from the ground, how unlikely it seems.