

## Shade

*Dixie Partridge*

Only the north slopes grew pines  
above the rocky hillside farm,  
and we sought shelter there in our climbings.

Here, in our plantings under suns  
of this desert plateau, trees  
came before grass, before garden.  
Away from town on the treeless flats,  
the sheet of light spreads out and out  
in changing tints where scant clouds pass on.

\* \* \*

The image that came to me strongest  
in meeting my father's death  
was of his black and white cattle bunched  
under the dark shadow of cottonwood  
along a creekbed—the cattle  
long gone, the creekbed, even.

\* \* \*

Today, in the heaviness of this July heat,  
word came of a friend's diagnosis  
with its sudden re-orderings  
of time: the turning photos of wall calendars  
shockingly vivid, swift  
yet ephemeral . . . perhaps six months . . .  
perhaps a year.

A builder, he tells me  
he's not afraid of dying, but of leaving  
things half finished, his full shop and garage  
too heavy a weight to bequeath.  
Growing weaker, he works tirelessly—  
sons alongside—clearing out  
and giving away.

\* \* \*

We struggle always to muster  
what is necessary . . .  
at times to our surprise, the subconscious  
will map a shortcut way.

Tonight in the cooling dusk I'll walk along the wide  
Columbia, flush with the great plateau—  
home . . . and far from home.  
The river, steep in undertow, will look  
subdued, shaded, but like polished steel  
in its surface drift and ripple.