

Ken Meisel

Sermon of the Mourning Dove

On the outstretched edge
of the peach tree's limb
you sing your mourning song

to the pearl-gray horizon
becoming daisy white
and mango orange

in the dawn's quiet lustre.
All the other birds, loud, ecstatic,
singing their daybreak songs

in the maple trees and the solid oaks
cannot hear you – they don't even try –
as you lean your wide,

generous gray chest
over the edge
of this peach tree branch

and you mourn
from your one
red trillium heart

(– so full of its ripe loss
and its burnt aching –)
so that your disconcerted body,

capsized over
on its conquered little gray stalk
can both give up

and exalt for a nest at the same time
(which is the exact way
that life

both expands and retreats in us
like an accordion
at the same time.)

And you capture again

and again for me,
what it is to be

a living being
with an emptying hour glass
set inside a rib cage

meant to protect us
– although it never truly does –
because we all

must find a nest in this life,
and then we must let it all go
at the same time –

as we're hurled backward
and out-ways,
by the long journey's

tempest and drain.
Mourning dove –
bird of the turning

back of stark feral night sky
into daybreak's lustrous sunlight
and the afternoon's

over-ripe radiance
fading into melancholic afterglow –
don't bring anyone

or anything
back to me right now:
instead, just let me

hold on and let go –
in the exact way
that you inhale and release

from inside the red trillium
of your heart
all that's disquieted

and emptied in you by your song:
sing for me – right now –
this mourning song

that says we're beings

made of soft laments
and nesting calls

on the twist and flare
of the peach tree's
extended outer branch

as the morning –
so lovely
and so indifferent –

comes rising up again
behind the blue horizon,
to greet me.

Hear my prayers and missives to you,
gray mourning dove
with your two ink eyes

hiding one of the encrypted
chapters of the Book of Love
inside them.

Solitary dove, with the streak
of a clown's rouge
smudged across your beak

like the blood of the recording angel
carrying in it
all the data

of our soul's nesting
and all our subsequent
bodily forgetting,

don't give anyone
or anything back to me
this morning:

instead, just sing ahead of me
this one
melancholic exaltation

of how we nest
in one body for a lifetime –
and then we let go.

Ken Meisel is a poet and psychotherapist from the Detroit area. He is a 2012 Kresge Arts Literary Fellow, Pushcart Prize nominee, Swan Duckling chapbook contest winner, winner of the Liakoura Prize and the author of six poetry collections: *The Drunken Sweetheart at My Door* (FutureCycle Press: 2015), *Scrap Metal Mantra Poems* (Main Street Rag: 2013), *Beautiful Rust* (Bottom Dog Press: 2009), *Just Listening* (Pure Heart Press: 2007), *Before Exiting* (Pure Heart Press: 2006) and *Sometimes the Wind* (March Street Press: 2002). His work is in more than 90 magazines including *Cream City Review*, *Rattle*, *Dressing Room Poetry Journal*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Concho River Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Boxcar Review*, *Origins Journal*, *The Bookends Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Lake Effect*, *Soundings East*, *Gravel Magazine*, and *Lullwater*. He has a new book, entitled *Mortal Lullabies*, forthcoming in 2018 through FutureCycle Press. He was the featured poet interview in *Rattle Magazine's* September, 2017 Rust Belt Issue.