

# RACHAEL M. BRADLEY

## THE SHRINKING CIRCLE

A ceiling of drought hangs  
in a sunless haze —  
on a muddied pond a white swan  
swims through a sepia world,  
bound in the shrinking circle  
of its flightless days.

Above the dust, mountains part  
the veils of drought —  
in the sun's sharp light  
kestrels hover  
binding earth to sky, tied always  
to the shadow-self that rushes  
plunges  
pivots on the prey . . .

A keen wing parts the sky  
and seasons pivot  
on the wheeling of a kestrel's flight —  
on the granite spire of the mountain's  
spine, the solstice passes . . .

air has weathered  
and embraced old rites, engraved

the calligraphy of dipping wing and sweep  
of kestrel quill

. . . winter hovers in the thinning light

But in a world where shadows merge  
and sun is broken  
frayed  
lost,  
deep in the veils  
of the drifting drought, a swan  
swims on . . .

For who can tell the solstice  
with even shadows gone . . .  
a sullen sky drinks in  
the shrinking circle of an earthbound swan.