

THE GIFT

for Aaron Copland

The killer frost came suddenly this year.
A warm baton had conjured tips of song
to breach the brutal soil before the snow.
In that interval a tree trunk shuddered
slabs of heavy bark dropping to the peat
and your face drifted on the icy brook
bright as an oak leaf bleeding harmony.

*no spring like that you scored for appalachia
a bank of wildflowers taking scent from gravel
sheep knee-deep in grass along a wind-break
of cherry trees shaker farmer at horse and plow
while a woman brushes dough from her fingers
finding god's word in the sweet slant of lowlight
their children circle then tumble into morning*

You came back to Banff for the mountain air
to tap a snowmelt from simplicities
of rock and cloud. And we sat at your feet
tuning blemished instruments to your ear.
You knew how to mine silver from the crude
though the vein lay deep beneath the skin.
We were your last and greatest symphony.

*when the lark calls out to the forest fringe
from his fencepost on the edge of silence
the trees darken his song into rapture:
what we create we have to leave behind
sound's idea confused by vibrations
dull earth thudding onto polished wood
as a killer frost comes down to kiss us*