

The Sneeze

Eagle, then vulture, seemed the night-green sweep
of the white pine's curving topmost bough,
and farther down the trunk there was a face:
a knot that without changing smiled, then leered.
I stood before the tree and said,
"Now my eye will fix these divided signs,
repair. An end to two-faced wavering.
I'll see in them what all desire:
the upward soaring, the blessing."

In the blank
snow I stood in concentration
at the end of my tracks, sole mark
of a moving creature on the new covering.
The hard light vibrated around,
burning, framing the tree. I tried
to look steadily but my eyes would run
and the snow-dazzle made me sneeze.

A fool
to sneeze, only to sneeze and run
at the eyes and nose under the gaze and wing-sweep
of this tree, this trial. Is it Cupid,
it came to me in self-derision, Cupid,
the little degeneration of desire,
who is present here, sneezing as he does
to sanction some marriage?

The tree
stood still in its winter image, trembling
in a wind between the blessed and malign.

Albert F. Moritz