

**Appropriate Voices**

Only the first people hear the old words.  
No matter how hard I listen  
my warm cheek against the snow  
until my ear is frozen,  
this wilderness does not sing  
in the voices of my ancestors.

New words huddle there in silence,  
rough gemstones waiting for the light;  
they lurk like silent children  
waiting to be heard,  
almost women, almost men  
constrained by dark clerics and timid elders.  
And I, the careless lapidary  
whose white hammer shatters the jewel,  
I cannot utter them here.

*E. Russell Smith*