

Genesis: Primeval Rivers and Forests

If these weren't so very ancient,
they might easily be found. But they are
deeper than subterranean Siberia,
of a longer past than the oldest lichen
fossil discovered in Rhynie soil, from
farther away than found meteorite
remnants of three billion years.

These primeval forests and rivers
were the first to believe in trees dead
but standing. They were the first
to envision the living in the decay
of the down-dead, the first to conceive
possible orange rills of fungi, fluted
white helvella, beetles, spider mites
and spotted newts, a warty jumping slug
hidden beneath fallen needles and duff.

Birds were among them then before
there were birds, being mere wings of sun
off the rivers before there were rivers,
being mere flitting shadows in the upper
canopy before there were shadows before
there were canopies of flitting leaves.

And although these ancient waters
flowing through storied rain forests
have never been told, I imagine how
they imagined before they conceived
fish as smooth as silver glass, fat
and buoyant on river bottoms, how
they dreamed those fish swirling
in schools of crystal to the surface
without yet having bones, with no
eyes of gold or scarlet gills, before
flood or drought, current or cutbank.

Today the hiss of a single stem
of seeded grass alone in a slender
wind recalls the silence in far rivers
and forests preparing for themselves,
a silence expectant of wind, expectant
of seed. A brief fragrance passing now
suggests their beginning from absence,
the fragrance of the origin of fragrance,
damp oakmoss, sun on decay, the scent
of nostalgia for a thing I imagined
I knew before I knew.

Pattiann Rogers