

1976

Building a River

Paul Hoover

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Come hamadryad and macaw,
and the deer my great-grandfather the circuit-rider
poached in 1886, you come too.

To the sparrows of 1911, 1931, and 1937,
to the nanny-goats washed away
in the abattoir,
to the antelopes left unpainted on the cave wall,

I give you my shape, you give my shadow yours.

The divided soul is prematurely old,
and if it lives, grows younger.
Zebra, lie down
in the sweet grass under the lion's paw.

Fieldmouse lie down, civet lie down,
lie down in the shadow of my hand, as even now
it opens to let you go . . .

Only the pathological move the world
to tears, only the twice-born
can save you:

I make my walls so marvelous and strange
roofs don't stop here at all.

Building a River / Paul Hoover

I wanted a river that would move
through its banks like a saw.
On this river, my voice would be
a blueprint wadded in a bottle.
At night, fish would rise through the water
like needles through cloth.

In order to build correctly,
I watched all signs: major eclipses,
the tides in the lakes of my fingernails.
Soon I was building.
The river towered up from its base.
Blue as I'd imagined,
it lay overland like a pair of trousers.

One day, in the middle of my river,
I heard a storm coming.
Trees shook, the rain stumbled
on the ground behind me.
The river broke like a great wall
away from its scaffold, leaving only
the sad steeple of one wave.

Left Hand Canyon / William Matthews

for Richard Hugo

The Rev. Royal Filkin preaches
tomorrow on why we are sad.
Brethren, Montana's a landscape
requiring faith: the visible
government arrives in trucks,
if you live out far enough.
If you live in town, the government's
gone, on errands, in trucks.

Let citizens go to meetings,
I'll stay home. I hate a parade.
By the time you get the trout
up through the tiny triangular
holes in the Coors cans, they're so
small you have to throw them back.
Glum miles we go
to Grandmother's house.