Eric Pankey

Elegiac Variations

for Larry Levis

1. Mood Indigo

Ahead of me the day ahead

As I come down out of the Blue Mountain
Pine ridge dogwood
   a palimpsest of haze
A gulley of cornflowers

Where is the pleasure of arrival
Now that then has become now

All that is left of the western night

Is the coal and indigo
   of the hawk’s eyes
Coal and indigo and a grain of salt

And of the fog
   one drop on each thorn

How far I have come to be only here

2. The Starling’s Lullabye

Another day kindled and put out

Thus the crimped thread of smoke
Thus the ember motes that glint and fall
Thus the acrid aftertaste on my tongue

after so few words

The cedar's charred wand
The nettlebed's sloughed ash
The salt light flint-gray on the marsh

It is hard to extinguish desire

All evening the starlings taunt
From the conflagration of the firethorn

What it burns it fuels with the soul

3. To Go Home is to Take Back a Name

The moon

its mouth sealed shut with wax
Maintains its vow of silence

Across the rain-washed range
Across the stripped vineyard
Across the blade of a pruning hook

Left to rust in a furrow

the moon drags its habit

How can one not mistake
Intensity for purity
Paradise for these ill-lit shambles

By now the dark fields are wild with rose
By now the thistle is worn to a crown
4. The Blues

How heavy the mortal body of Christ
Two angels hold half in the tomb half out
On display for our pity and for pity’s sake

His face unrestored is but a bluish blur and canvas weave

Lord I just can't keep from crying sometimes
Lord I just can't keep from crying sometimes
When my heart’s full of sorrow
When my eyes are filled with tears
Lord I just can't keep from crying sometimes

No pain no suffering to be read
As compensation as consolation for our own

5. Study for Rain

Between cypress and olive the shadow of rain

The rag ends of rain blown clear
It rained and the rain stopped
How little of which we are certain resembles the truth

Rushlight cloudlight a dull smoulder
The hive a cask of untuned static
A tinderbox of sparks

Between cypress and olive
the footpath winds
Where the marble's worn water pools
If the god had not made pale honey
I should have said this rain was far sweeter

6. Confronting the Oracle in Fiesole

Only the lizard to show the way
Little green flame through the ruins
A wordless scrawl and scuttle on the Etruscan wall

Only the lizard to find a foothold
of shade

If from the earth we come
If to the earth we return
Then there is in the end
    no digression
The one way home is the one way home

Green and quicksilver in the sepia shadows
Green and quicksilver
    the lizard holds still for now

For now still it holds its tongue