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JENNIFER MOXLEY

THERE IS A BIRDSONG AT THE ROOT OF POETRY*

for Ann Lauterbach

Hemmed in by an untenable image

feathers planted

below fragile branches

of avian fee scaly crossroads scoring

138 a particular blue of sky

offending

through the uselessness of misplaced forms thorny prongs

that make no sense (and yet belong)

on the ground

out of which

the bird wings stiffly jut

rigid as

rhubarb leaf

rising from out the muffled beak

THE IOWA REVIEW
site of a perverse smothering

throted core submerged Should you

kneel the body's aged mechanism

beneath the shade of dry feathers Should you

place the vulnerable cavern

of ear—trembling passage to psyche's

failures our fall

into suffering knowledge— Should you

listen you will hear

the wasted strains of an underground song

deadened by thoughtless depths

but alive

for the dead have kept it

safe from false music

a ghoulish guard of love safe from

she who bullied by the cruelty of others

the false sophistication of fashionable libraries

the envy of those

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who would molest the world into false confessions

and banish all mystery

with their dripping candles who would

unearth the birdsong to cage it

she who will end by destroying what she loves most

Shhhh, quiet

listen

it is drawn by other amblers

its strains awake in our attentions

as a sudden bewildering happiness

ear wedded to earth, Listen

and hear

what those who know all

can not

*Robert Duncan, letter to Denise Levertov, August 22, 1962