

WHO SHALL BE THE SUN?

The People said, "Who shall be the sun?"
Raven cried, "Raven! Raven!"
His eye was black. He imagined rising and setting
Grandly, his great wings spreading over the People.
All days would belong to him. No one
Would see the earth without marvelous Raven.

He rose then out of the thick night.
He crooked his ragged wings, flapping them wildly,
Yet he made evening all day long,
Nothing but gloom in the woods, shade on the rivers.
The People grunted: "Get away from the sky!
You are too dark! Come down, foolish Raven!"

The People said, "Someone else must try."
Hawk screamed, "Hawk! Hawk!"
His eye was yellow. He imagined rising and rising
High over the specks of the tiny People.
He would be alone, taller than the wind. No one
Would cast a shadow without brilliant Hawk.

He rose then out of the empty night.
He soared and climbed into the yellow air
As high as noon, clenching his talons,
His bright wings flashing in the eye of the heavens.
The People squinted and shouted: "Too much daylight!
Get out of the sky! Come down, ignorant Hawk!"

The People said, "But we must have someone."
Coyote howled, "Coyote! Coyote!"
His eye was red. He imagined jumping
And running low over the bent heads of the People.
He would make them crouch all day. No one
Would escape the tricks of clever Coyote.

He rose then out of the hole of night.
He darted and leaped over the red clouds
As swift as stormfire, his jaws gleaming,
His wild breath burning over the crowns of trees.
The People sweated and sputtered, diving into water,
“You will cook the earth! Come down, crazy Coyote!”

The People said, “We shall have no sun at all!”
But Snake whispered, “I have dreamed I was the sun.”
Raven, Hawk, and Coyote mocked him by torchlight:
“You cannot scream or howl! You cannot run or fly!
You cannot burn, dazzle, or blacken the earth!
How can you be the sun?” “By dreaming,” Snake whispered.

He rose then out of the rich night.
He coiled in a ball, low in the morning sky.
Slowly he shed the Red Skin of Dawn,
The Skin of the Blue Noontime, the Skin of Gold,
And last the Skin of Darkness, and the People
Slept in their lodges, safe, till he coiled again.