

Elegy for a Metaphor: Dogwood/Pear  
Tree · *Michael S. Harper*

*for Robert Hayden and James Wright*

Whatever city or country road  
you two are on  
there are nettles,  
and the dark invisible  
elements cling to your skins  
though you do not cry  
and you do not scratch  
your arms at 45 degree angles  
at the landing points of a swan  
in the Ohio, the Detroit River;

at the Paradise Theatre  
you named the cellist  
with the fanatical fingers  
of the plumber, the exorcist,  
and though the gimmickry at wrist  
and kneecap could lift the seance  
table, your voice was real  
in the gait and laughter of Uncle  
Henry, who could dance on either  
leg, wooden or real, to the sound  
of the troop train megaphone,  
catching the fine pitch of a singer  
on the athletic fields of Virginia.

At the Radisson Hotel  
we once took a fine angel  
of the law to the convention center  
and put her down as an egret  
in the subzero platform of a friend—  
this is Minneapolis, the movies  
all of strangers, holding themselves  
in the delicacy of treading water,  
while they wait for the trumpet  
of the 20th century limited  
over the bluff or cranny.

You two men like to confront  
the craters of history and spillage,  
our natural infections of you  
innoculating blankets and fur,  
ethos of cadaver and sunflower.

I hold the dogwood blossom,  
eat the pear, and watch the nettle  
swim up in the pools  
of the completed song  
of Leadbelly and Little Crow  
crooning the buffalo and horse  
to the changes and the bridge  
of a twelve-string guitar,  
the melody of *Irene*;  
this is really goodbye—  
I can see the precious stones  
of embolism and consumption  
on the platinum wires of the mouth:  
in the flowing rivers, in the public baths  
of Ohio and Michigan.