

The Cardinal

Para Ernesto Cardinal

S. Tinley

What breath gives you the courage to walk these paths?

What sky that houses your God? Is it not the same sky under which the  
killing

Is wrought, the crimson tears of the oppressed falling on the muddied  
boots that crunch gravel roads with grave intent? Is that sky wide enough for  
all the air to fill every peasant's heart and lift every bird's wing?

For I cannot see beyond the mountains knowing that the disease of  
oppression slithers its way, marching hidden paths upon bloody boots. I  
know you must embrace them for they shield those who would stand tall;  
they house the birds that have become commerce and you must feel closer to  
your Maker who gives you strength. But the living is hard in that thin air and  
lush steepness. The mountains block my view of the future but not of the  
past. They stand as a comrade would: quietly resilient, committed,  
unmovable.

But as the cardinal knows the parrot, respecting each for their ways of flight  
and fight, so too can the opposite be. These forces that know nothing but the  
self-idolatry of the few who would promise them much, they are as alike as  
the cardinal and the parrot—same specie, same intention for survival. Yet  
their ignorance and brutality born on the lust for power is unlike even the  
vulture who feeds upon those already dead. These forces of men are unlike

any animal—their killing has exceeded all ideal, surpassed all ethic. They kill for their own ego-sport.

It must be hard for you to retain such faith in your God when things cannot hold and the center of human compassion falls apart. Such simple existence would suffice and now all the poverty around you is the shame of killing. I do not see how you can steady the torn hearts of those who only know simplicity.

The earth swallows these people in the wake of its political tomb, marching, marching as did Cortez the Killer before. Some day the graves dug with shoveled oppression will be exhumed and the soil, still red and wet and stirred with the bones of those who fought with rakes and shovels will come back as ghosts to haunt the nights of every man who turned a cheek. But you showed your face, full and stern, the pacifist who stood his ground on the wings of your God's message. It could not have been easy.