

Ashland University

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Etude: the Wedding Pines (forthcoming in "Into a New Country")

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Etude: The Wedding Pines

planted 1878

I

I walk in shade beneath the canopy
of Norway spruces dropping cones upon
the grass; two immigrants from Germany
first planted them, now visited by children
of their children's children, more than a century
ago to mark their wedding celebration.
Descendants carry still their memories
as vivid as these skyward-reaching trees.

II

Two decades we have lived here. Every year
my plow turns up the solid evidence
that many lived and worked here earlier
and later than these farming immigrants,
and native people walked and hunted here
before and since the glacier's advance.
Who owns this land that we are said to own,
when all these generations called it home?

III

Paired centenarians long past the centenary
tower over maple, oak, and elm
that live within their shade; through history
they watched herds pass and myriad people come
and go upon the land that tells their story
in its deeper reaches like the wren,
who weaves her nest of fallen twigs and threads
them bound and wound with hair of a dog that's dead.

IV

Out of soil and the times we weave
the tapestries of changing lives, and yet
we know that not, whatever we believe,

one thread once stitched can ever be torn out,
as with the land, where everything we leave
remains for our inheritors to sift,
and every fire, glacier, drought, and flood
retreating writes its short or lengthy episode.

V

The moving branches sing an endless song
from trunks called landmarks by the locals, made of
cone, sapling, giant where birds throng,
as we are made of things we never heard of,
and all the lives we lived here short or long,
and everything we loved and did not love.
Those trees reach eighty feet into the sky
where geese send out their migratory cry.