



PROJECT MUSE®

Hammered Dulcimer

Lisa Williams

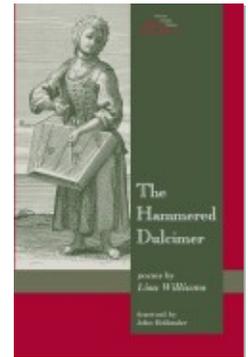
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AFTER A LINE OF PLATO

I

In the city that shall be perfect,
in the city of intelligence
where thinking reigns
and desire is at rest
and what happens happens
because the self wills it
to be so, you are reading.
I am almost asleep.
The sun slants
on your belly, over your limbs.
I am watching it find circumstance.
I am wondering how fast, how fast,
this abstract energy goes.
Outside, children's shrieks
mix with birdsong and men's saws
and feet back and forth. I am trying
to rise in this cavern of sound
as if with a terrible weight.
The sun swings around
our flesh, armed and glorious,
a procession of ages,
a procession of myth.
If it is true that the clichés follow us
because they have something to say
then this crow on a giant oak tree
makes a very important point.
It croaks a series of harsh notes:
One, two, three.
About our mortality, maybe.
One, two, three.

Or the force of the mind
when it lands on the tree of the body
and believes it owns everything.

One, two, three.

When Satan entered the garden,
he chose a bird

as his initial enchantment, his primary matter,
its black feathers flecked
with iridescence,

all the colors of the garden
playing over its sheen.

He found the highest tree

to peruse his newfound paradise from
and stayed there a very long time
pondering what to begin.

It must have been spring.

The fruits of his provocation
hanging down. The blunt sounds

of animals in the shadows,
fleshly things. A man and a woman
asleep, her dreaming

of difference.

This is the place
where what I am

and what I would like to be
opens its wings . . .

Today is Saturday. The tuliptrees'

pale yellow-greens
bloom unfinished, the fringed palms
of the maple unravel,

tiny, red-veined. Pater says
"the seemingly new is old also"
and "mere matter alone

is nothing.” Our crow doesn’t know this
as he sends out his song
to a distance that constantly
takes it. He’s the detail
unable to see
past its beak. But the devil in us
knows how surely we reside
at the periphery, how foolish
is all speech.

II

And this is what the world is.
Primarily music. Not meaning
but action and form. Not meaning.
In the city of perpetual motion,
in the city that *will* be enough,
the matter itself
has arrived.
It lands in the midst of our innocence.
It lands with its own kind of innocence,
a hard fact beneath it,
the soft air around.
Both the body of stillness
and the body of flight,
poised on a branch
no soul could reach,
with the voice that is not prettiest,
it will sing,
all the colors of the garden
playing over its wings,
while the adequate, more than adequate
promise hangs—

