

Crow, late in the barking hour

Stands before the open forest
prepared to forge a promise to the night
with a drop of blood, but
he has forgotten the knife
He pecks at his chest, plucks
feather after feather,
scratches at each leg,
trying to tear the body's veil
The moon a cloud of dreams
gathering its children
A leafless branch swings back and forth
keeping time,
nothing on the end of it,
except his mind
Below, two birds pull at a worm
How long it takes, this work of being,
this seeking after one's own blood
Touching talon to crimson, he draws
in the screaming air,
refusing to look at what he's making
for fear he will never finish
It could be a river, or a spirit leaving his mouth,
or a letter to God,
(in truth, he sees only the wriggling worm)
At last, he thinks he has it, but no,
it's just the sound of an axe
far off in the folding woods,
a coyote's cry caught beneath
the understory
of its own life