

## R.W. Stedinger / FIVE POEMS

### COHO SALMON

I

Always it seems, Love, even in sleep,  
Your silver hips wave, flash and flutter  
Like leafage in the wind  
As you browse the river mouth for squid,  
Tail sweeping back and forth  
Against the darkness, against the light,  
Swimming deeper and deeper  
Upstream into less and less  
The higher you go into the unseen mountains.

II

Yet while all is done between us you continue,  
Love, the journey:  
Beached on a rounded stone, you flap  
Against earth like a new moon and fall  
Till gills flared, your eyes before my eyes  
Clouding, as your lips open and close  
Trying to say something entering death,  
Amazed to see me standing here  
And breathing air.

EASTER LILY  
*for Anne*

You are the spring day  
In which all are resurrected,  
The shy night in which bedded lovers

Emboldened like acrobats,  
Bring off their feats giving mutual smile;  
You are the dew of my days,

Where the child in you leaps out of a winter grave.  
But mark you the vaguely heart-shaped  
Patterns of this wild lily's leaves:

May we out of such cloudy jade  
Distill clear emerald,  
Shape with closed eyes a seeing touch,

A hard, determined green  
Of many facets, but of one light invincible  
Through all the dark perduring

As music and song like this,  
Which bodied forth in the country of your love  
Is yours.

## CHERRY TREE

A soft memory of snow  
Rising in your budding limbs  
Flowers in the mirror of morning twilight.

You say nothing, flushed refusing,  
As you root yourself deeper  
In the bluegrass blanket.

My pierced light dawning quickens in your cold,  
And the womb of your branches throbs:

Hereafter, feelings, shall we speak volumes in eyes,  
In silence, our common tongue.

## ROCK DOVE

Shy as you are, and non-committal,  
You do not see this woman's open hand  
But the empty palm,  
And in challenged doubt, a weapon,  
And you peck it. A fist too  
Is worthless though blunt to you  
Till it opens proffering popcorn:  
Then you are all courage  
By hunger blinded, by her indolence  
Controlled. Teasing the exploded seed,  
Which will never now know its own careful flowering,  
You dance in nervous circles weaving near and far  
Shredding the white heart on the pavement  
Till a delighted child chases you away.

## SALMONBERRY

Reaching through thorns,  
I pinch your pink nipples firm  
between stung fingers  
And the whole of you quakes.  
I take you into my mouth  
Till my tongue bleeds  
Or you bleed. The taste is  
The same: sweet with an edge.