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on Neile Graham

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Neile Graham
Seven Robins
Penumbra Press
Moonbeam, Ontario
1983
\$6.95

Language is our sponsor and obligation. It brings us into being and requires our participation in its becoming. Ms. Graham's *Seven Robins* has as its purpose an immersion in the dual purpose of language. The danger in this project is of silence brought about by madness or retreat. What distinguishes Ms. Graham's work is a concern with silence as unarticulated fullness rather than silence as void.

The visionary Cassandra says, in the poem bearing her name:

inside the darkness the door seals
and I am complete:
my enclosed words
have a heartbeat, more powerful
that discourse, pulsing
through my eyes.

Words are the heartbeat, yet without discourse she is sealed in the darkness of an unshared vision. In mapping the distance of language's desire to be spoken we come to the other extreme— that of retreat and despair. In "St. Maudlin (La Folle)" Ms. Graham writes:

The amazing distance:
all the years
she has travelled to come to this;
'I meant to write in praise of it,
but the distance she has come to is
only the edge.'

Failure to praise the distance unless the territory can be fixed is its own kind of despair. Between these two possibilities the poet wanders and waits. Words come from the fullness:

When I first arrived here I saw there were only
two directions: up and down the river. A compass
would point out no other course. There was nothing
much here but the river, and the weather was always
river. I remember when I asked the man gathering
trout the time of day, he glanced at his watch, and
replied, *River*.

Paradoxically, what at first appears to bear no sustenance adequate for life reveals itself to be sustenance as well as bearer.